

... But I LIKE Shiny ...

A Biblical Critique of Christmas



Rosanna Evans
BAR Bib. Sch., M. Div. Student



Within the pages of this book, I put forth the premise to the New Testament Church that the keeping of Christmas as we know it is not only “not necessary”, but is actually offensive to God, on at least a few fronts.

Against the clear words of the Lord, the Church coveted the things of their former lives and the world, and instead of detesting them, as we should; we have embraced them and agreed to include them in our worship to the Holy One of Israel. We, like Achan, have chosen to hide these items of non-biblical faith deep under the tents of our lives,

in order that we may bring them out and enjoy them. We have buried the origins of these pagan things so deep that most of us are not even really aware of these roots.

About the Author: Rosanna Evans is a wife and mother who concurrently works as an off-site medical transcriptionist and a call centre person at a funeral home. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Religion (BAR) as a Biblical Scholar in 2001 from Rocky Mountain Bible College in Calgary, AB and is currently working on her Master's degree of Divinity through Trinity School of Apologetics via distance education. She lives in Calgary, AB, Canada with Bill, her husband of almost 25 years, and their son, Bill Jr.; their daughter, Tabitha and her husband, Brad, live close by.

ISBN 978-0-9809246-0-2

ID: 1707703
www.lulu.com



... But I LIKE Shiny ...
A Biblical Critique of Christmas

Rosanna Evans, BAR Bib. Sch.,
M. Div Student

Calgary, Alberta, Canada

© 2007 by Rosanna Evans
All rights reserved.

ISBN 978-0-9809246-0-2

Printed in the United States of America.

Preface

This book has been written in order to help people understand the very pagan origins of Christmas.

Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to acknowledge YHVH, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whose words in His book inspired me to take action and write this book.

Secondly, I would like to thank Mira for speaking to me about the origins of Christmas from her viewpoint and causing me to begin to question the celebration that most of Christendom holds as “Jesus’ birthday”.

The third major catalyst in the creation of “... But I LIKE Shiny...” is my husband, without which this book would never have been written. He asked me to write it, and then spent many hours by himself to allow this task to be accomplished. During those many lonely hours, he made countless dinners for the two of us and always had an encouraging word for me, even when we faced opposition from both within and outside of the established church.

Fourthly, I would like to acknowledge Maurice and Sylvia, who endured hour after hour of conversation about this topic and who gave me the title of the book itself – thanks! I also wanted to thank Maurice, who gave me the title of the book, once he ran out of rebuttals to the responses I gave him.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge Tabitha, Bradley, Sandra, and countless other saints who have – and continue to – pray that the Body of Christ will understand and heed the message written in these pages.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to all of those believers who ever dared question the “status quo” within the church of Christ.

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| SECTION I PREAMBLE..... | 1 |
| CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| JUST CALL ME THOMAS..... | 2 |
| THE WORD OF THE LORD – TRUTH | 3 |
| OUR SUBJECTIVE FEELINGS | 4 |
| THE TRUTH AND OUR TRADITIONS | 5 |
| A NOTE ON LEGALISM | 6 |
| <i>What is Legalism?</i> | 6 |
| Legalism is Trying to be Saved through the Keeping of the Law | 7 |
| Legalism is Adding More to the Word of God or Taking Away from the Word..... | 9 |
| THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH AND THE WORLD | 10 |
| CHAPTER 2: THE ISSUE AT HAND - CHRISTMAS | 13 |
| MY THESIS | 13 |
| <i>Clarification</i> | 13 |
| What I am NOT Saying..... | 13 |
| What I Am Saying..... | 15 |
| A Note on Sources..... | 16 |
| Why I Feel Compelled to Write This Book | 16 |
| <i>Questions to Ponder</i> | 18 |
| <i>Am I the Only One?</i> | 20 |
| Some Others | 20 |
| Calvin and Luther: Opposing Ideologies | 27 |
| Calvin – Worship Okay Only If Sanctioned in Scripture | 27 |
| Luther – Worship Okay If It is Not Specifically Denounced in Scripture | 29 |
| Which Opinion is Right? | 29 |
| SECTION III WHAT IS CHRISTMAS ABOUT? | 33 |
| CHAPTER 3: ORIGIN OF THE WORD ITSELF | 35 |
| OKAY, SO WHAT IS THE MASS? | 36 |
| <i>Transub – WHAT?</i> | 38 |
| <i>Another Anti-Biblical Teaching</i> | 39 |
| SO WHAT | 39 |
| <i>The Mass Goes Against Scripture in Context</i> | 39 |
| <i>We Should Honour Him Even in the Name of Celebrations We Keep..</i> 41 | |
| CHAPTER 4: EARLY CELEBRATION | 43 |
| CHAPTER 5: WHY DID WE SET THIS DATE? | 45 |
| THE CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE..... | 45 |
| TWO EVANGELICAL PERSPECTIVES..... | 47 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| CHAPTER 6: SHOULD WE KEEP DECEMBER 25TH AS THE DATE? | 51 |
| A CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE..... | 52 |
| GENERAL SCHOLARSHIP | 54 |
| EVANGELISM OF THE MASSES | 57 |
| THE IMMINENCE OF HIS RETURN | 60 |
| CHAPTER 7: WHAT ABOUT OTHER “PAGAN” STUFF THAT OUR FAITH HAS “INTEGRATED”? | 62 |
| WE HAVE LIBERTY IN CHRIST | 65 |
| <i>Romans 6:14</i> | 65 |
| <i>I Corinthians 10:23</i> | 67 |
| <i>Romans 14</i> | 69 |
| Keeping Holy Time | 72 |
| Paul Kept Holy Time..... | 73 |
| CHAPTER 8: THE ROMAN INFLUENCE ON CHRISTENDOM | 75 |
| SATURNALIA AND MITHRAISM: A PART OF THE LEGACY | 78 |
| HAS THE CHURCH REPLACED ISRAEL?..... | 81 |
| CHAPTER 9: ELEMENTS OF CHRISTMAS | 83 |
| GREENERY TO DECORATE THE HOME | 83 |
| <i>Holly and Ivy</i> | 84 |
| <i>Mistletoe</i> | 85 |
| <i>Laurels</i> | 90 |
| <i>Christmas Trees</i> | 91 |
| GIFT GIVING | 95 |
| <i>Who Should be Getting the Gifts?</i> | 95 |
| <i>Do Not Love the Things of the World</i> | 97 |
| <i>Conclusion about Christmas Gifts and Christmas Trees</i> | 98 |
| CHAPTER 10: SANTA CLAUS | 100 |
| WHO WAS SANTA CLAUS, ANYWAY | 100 |
| <i>Kriss Kringle</i> | 103 |
| Sainthood..... | 104 |
| The Catholic Perspective..... | 104 |
| What is a Biblical “Saint”?..... | 109 |
| An Evangelical Perspective on Consulting the Dead | 110 |
| A COMPARISON BETWEEN JESUS AND SANTA CLAUS | 113 |
| WHY ARE WE INCLUDING SANTA CLAUS AS A PART OF A CELEBRATION SUPPOSEDLY RESERVED FOR THE LORD ALONE? | 116 |
| CHAPTER 11: CAROLLING (WASSAILING)..... | 117 |
| THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN SCRIPTURE..... | 119 |
| THE ROLE OF CHRISTMAS CAROLS IN THE CHURCH..... | 120 |
| THE ROLE OF CHRISTMAS CAROLS IN THE WORLD | 121 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| SOME OF THE CAROLS WE SING..... | 122 |
| <i>“Angels We Have Heard on High”</i> | 122 |
| <i>“Away in a Manger”</i> | 124 |
| <i>“Silent Night”</i> | 125 |
| <i>“Hark the Herald Angels Sing”</i> | 126 |
| <i>“O Come Emmanuel”</i> | 127 |
| <i>“The Holly and the Ivy”</i> | 128 |
| <i>Many Other Songs with Errors in Them</i> | 129 |
| CHAPTER 12: WHAT IS THE “GOSPEL” PRESENTED BY CHRISTMAS? | 133 |
| JUST BECAUSE GOD CAN USE SOMETHING DOESN’T MEAN WE SHOULD DO IT | 136 |
| SECTION III WHAT DOES GOD HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THIS? .138 | |
| CHAPTER 13: WHO IS GOD? | 139 |
| HIS NATURE NEVER CHANGES | 139 |
| HE IS HOLY | 140 |
| HE IS JEALOUS | 141 |
| <i>Idolatry Provokes Him to Jealousy</i> | 141 |
| CHAPTER 14: WHAT ABOUT SALVATION AND GRACE?..... | 143 |
| WHAT IS THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST, ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE? | 143 |
| <i>Man is a Sinner</i> | 143 |
| The Soul that Sins Shall Die..... | 145 |
| Man is Desperately Wicked and Needs to be Saved from His Sins, as He Cannot Save Himself | 145 |
| <i>God is Love</i> | 147 |
| <i>Jesus is the Way</i> | 149 |
| The Focus of Our Preaching Should Be the Cross, not the Crèche | 150 |
| True for You, but Not True for Me? | 152 |
| <i>Faith is the Key</i> | 153 |
| Faith? | 155 |
| Love? | 155 |
| Love equals Obedience? | 156 |
| Where Does Grace Come In? | 157 |
| CHAPTER 15: COMMANDS OF GOD..... | 159 |
| HOW DOES GOD VIEW THE MIXING OF THE HOLY AND THE PROFANE?... 160 | |
| KEEPING THINGS ASSOCIATED WITH IDOLS AND/OR PAGANS | 161 |
| CHAPTER 16: THE WORD OF GOD NEVER RETURNS VOID..... | 164 |
| WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH US?..... | 166 |
| BUT WE ARE SINCERE – WE WANT TO WORSHIP GOD WITH ALL WE HAVE | 166 |
| CHAPTER 17: ADOPTING THE PRACTICES OF THE WORLD...169 | |

| | |
|--|------------|
| FLIRTING WITH THE WORLD PROVOKES HIM TO JEALOUSY | 170 |
| ESTEEMING THE WORLD’S PRACTICES..... | 171 |
| CHAPTER 18: HOLDING FAST TO THE TRUTH – IN MOST THINGS | 174 |
| CHAPTER 19: CONCLUSION | 177 |
| SECTION IV APPENDICES | 186 |
| “APPENDIX A” | 187 |
| <i>CRITIQUE ARTICLE: “WHY DO SOME TEACH THAT THE CHURCH WILL ENDURE THE TRIBULATION?”</i> | 187 |
| <i>Introduction: The Background</i> | <i>187</i> |
| <i>The Article and Its Contentions</i> | <i>187</i> |
| The First Contention – Emotional Reasons | 187 |
| The Second Contention – The Separate Nature of Israel and the Church .. | 188 |
| <i>The Third Contention – Historical Grounds.....</i> | <i>189</i> |
| THE RESPONSE..... | 189 |
| <i>Regarding Contentions One and Three</i> | <i>189</i> |
| <i>The Second Contention- The Real Concern.....</i> | <i>190</i> |
| The Separate Nature of the Jews and the Church – His Main Concern | 190 |
| The Tribulation..... | 191 |
| The Elect | 192 |
| The Signs..... | 193 |
| CONCLUSION | 194 |
| “APPENDIX B” | 196 |
| “ZECHARIAH’S PRESTIGIOUS HONOR” | 196 |
| “APPENDIX C” | 198 |
| LAMBS, WOLVES AND THE LIKE – ANIMAL SACRIFICES IN THE BIBLE..... | 198 |
| <i>Death Was Not a Part of the Original Plan.....</i> | <i>198</i> |
| <i>God is Just</i> | <i>198</i> |
| Sin is UGLY | 198 |
| The Cost of Sin is Specific | 199 |
| Animal Sacrifices Could Not Fully Pay the Price..... | 199 |
| Old Testament Sacrifices as Metaphors..... | 200 |
| SECTION V REFERENCES | 203 |
| REFERENCES CITED | 204 |
| REFERENCES CONSULTED | 210 |

Section I

PREAMBLE

In this first section, I deal with my background, some of the common concerns, and objections people may have with the subject matter.

1

Chapter 1: Introduction

When we were very little, we believed everything our parents, our friends' parents, our teachers, our uncles and aunts – and even our peers – told us. As we became older, we started to be a little more skeptical about things. School taught us to question much of the conventional wisdom we had been given. By the time we were adults, many of us believed little of what we heard and only half of what we saw.

In my case, I did not become a believer until I was well into my twenties. Unlike many within the Church subculture, I did not really grow up in the bosom of “The Faith”.¹

Before I finally became a believer, I asked a lot of questions and required a lot of proof, in order to be convinced of something. The first time someone in the Church ever heard me ask questions, like why I should believe in a God who let me be abused as a kid, I was told that I should not question, but simply believe. I didn't stop asking questions, though.

¹ My parents *did* take us to church when we were little, but they saw this as an obligation to God that we had to fulfil, not a joy and a time of fellowship. We had no concept of the true meaning of Christianity.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

When I finally *did* become a believer, I did so, not because someone told me I should “just believe”, necessarily, but because the evidence for the existence of God in the Person of Jesus Christ was overwhelming, as were the many other correlative proofs that I found. Given the reality that these things were true, I felt compelled to act on them. Jesus became the Lord (the One in Charge) of my life because Bible was the Truth; I had decided that it was going to be the Book that governed my life in matters of faith, behaviour and lifestyle.

Just Call Me Thomas

“I won’t believe it until I see it!!!” These words are often met with disdain in the Church today. “Just believe” we are told. When dealing with belief that the Lord is who He says He is, people point to this passage as “proof” that we should not question:

The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."²

Personally, I think that Thomas got a “bad rap”; he was doing what every person who is serious about worshipping the Lord in Truth should do – he was making sure that which was being said was really the case. Earlier, the disciples were actually warned by Jesus Himself not to believe it when people said that He was in the desert, or He was in the upper room. As far as I can ascertain, the guy was doing what he was told to do by the Master Himself. It is because of these things that Jesus patiently showed Thomas the proof that he needed.

² John 20:25-29

INTRODUCTION

People focus on the fact that Jesus goes on to say that those who have not seen Him and believe in Him would be blessed. However, many people miss the little blurb at the end of the chapter, placed right after this little pericope.³ It tells the readers that the many signs in the book of John were written down “*that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.*”⁴

This begs the question: should we ask questions and demand to have proof before we choose to believe/act upon something, or should we “just believe” without proof? I don’t know about you, but I would rather be like Thomas than someone who “just believes”. Let me show you why....

The Word of the Lord – Truth

The Word of the Lord is replete with allusions to testing the things that occur to ensure that they are from the Lord. Here are just a couple of examples:

Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, **and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.** - Acts 17:10, 11

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. **Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.** Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

³ A pericope is a self-contained story found within a larger body of text.

⁴ John 20:31. All Scriptures in this book are from the New King James Version of the Bible, unless otherwise stated. Additionally, unless otherwise noted, all emphases are mine throughout this book.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.⁵

One of the basic things we are taught in the Word is that we are to be careful about the things we receive as “Truth”. In fact, we are told that **our faith is contingent on the Word**. It is what informs us through the mediation of the Holy Spirit.

So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.⁶

Jesus, in praying to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane about His disciples, asked this of the Father:

Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.⁷

Also, when speaking to Satan about the temptation of food, Jesus said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’”⁸

I would like to ask each member in the Body of Christ to be careful to check out the message that is portrayed in these pages, not with pre-suppositions that have been placed in our minds so early in life that we “assume” them to be true, but to take the information and strain it through the words of God in context; ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the fullness of His truth in context.

Our Subjective Feelings

I would also like to remind people that the message of the Scriptures is

⁵ I Corinthians 5:16 – 24

⁶ Romans 10:17

⁷ John 17:17

⁸ As an aside, one need remember that the Word He was talking about was not only the Incarnate Word, Himself, but also the entire Old Testament. That which we believe in the New Covenant cannot directly contravene that which has already been revealed. If we just ignore the entire Old Testament, we have done a disservice to Jesus and all of His followers, since that WAS the Bible that Jesus read.

INTRODUCTION

unified; the Scripture in its entirety conveys truth; we cannot take verses out of the context in order to justify that which we condone. Neither can we simply excise others because they are uncomfortable. The word of God needs to stand *before* our feelings, no matter how compelling our feelings may be.

Often, our feelings are in opposition to the Truth. Take, for instance, the fact that telling the truth is very uncomfortable. In order to alleviate this, we often resort to platitudes or we simply refrain from speaking. Telling the truth is often not a fun thing to do. It is something that we would often rather NOT do in many circumstances. Regardless, we are supposed to be children of truth, since Jesus is the Way the Truth and the Life.

The Truth and Our Traditions

Tradition is not a bad thing, in and of itself. There are some wonderful traditions that have come from the Apostles that have enriched and informed our faith throughout the millennia.

Some of our family traditions, such as baking cookies together on a rainy day, bring continuity and a bond of togetherness throughout our generations, too. However, traditions, like our feelings, need to be in subjection to the Word of God.

Listen to what Jesus had to say about some traditions He came across:

Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God"- 'then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. "Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:

'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, *But their heart is far from Me. And in vain*

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

*they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'*⁹

This verse is also appropriately applied to some of our choices within God's Church. For example, in the 1800's (and 1900's for that matter), we somehow thought that unless people conformed to the European model of what "Christianity" was, they could not be saved. Thus, many hundreds of thousands of children, men and women were forced to give up everything that was a part of their culture, in order to be "Christianized". We literally turned away thousands of souls from the One who could save them because we bought into the lie that we ("European" English Christians) were the epitome of Christendom and made that our tradition....

Some traditions that we hold may crumble when we truly check them out by comparing them with the plain meaning of the Word of God.

A Note on Legalism

Recently, as I have asked some of the opponents of this book to read and critique the contents, I have been accused of "gross legalism". This word is often thrown around in Evangelical circles, but few, if any, have bothered to take a look at the Biblical definition of legalism.

What is Legalism?

As soon as the Old Testament is brought up, the Christian's obligation to obey the moral requirements of the Law¹⁰ – that is, the commandments, or other such things are mentioned – the cry of legalism is tabled. What really is legalism, though? We may have a variety of our own definitions about the word, based on teachings we have heard others give or based on whatever is the popular consensus of the day, but what is the Biblical definition of the word?

⁹ Matthew 15:1 – 9

¹⁰ We are no longer required to keep the ceremonial aspect of the commandments (the sacrificial aspect of the commandments *are being kept* through belief in Jesus' shed blood); however, even though we do not incur the penalty of the commandments (i.e. death), since Jesus freed us from that, we are still compelled to choose not to do that which the Lord has identified as sin; we were bought at a price.

INTRODUCTION

There are a few instances where the idea of legalism is dealt with in Scripture. The first comes from Galatians/Acts.

Legalism is Trying to be Saved through the Keeping of the Law

To keep the Law *without* the understanding and believing that God alone saves you (as long as I do the right things, the right practices, I will be able to stand before God as a righteous person) and *without* a desire to do the will of God, is legalism. He knows whether we believe in Jesus or not. I can never keep the Law in order to “be good enough” to get to heaven on my own merit through the adherence to the Law.

Our motivation for keeping the Law *cannot be our desire to “make ourselves acceptable to God”, as He has already done that.* This mistake of Legalism can be found in the book of Galatians, where the people *began* as believers, knowing that they were justified by faith. Later, though, they began to teach that one **MUST** keep the Law in order to be Christians; these men tried to teach that unless a person kept the works of the Law, they could not be **saved**.

But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; **for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified**¹¹. But if, while we seek to be justified by

¹¹ Justification (also known as Positional or Objective Sanctification – this occurs at the moment of Salvation; we are seen by God through the blood of Christ as justified or “just as if I have not sinned”). We are declared as righteous by God at the moment of our salvation (I Corinthians 6:11; Romans 4:6; Ephesians 1:4). It is because of this objective sanctification that we can all be called “saints of God”. God has set us apart. (I Corinthians 1:2)

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.¹²

This issue kept on coming up; the book of Acts gives a clear, concise take on the central issue:

And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, **you cannot be saved**."¹³

Basically, when the Jewish Christians (often called “Judaizers”) came in among the church of Galatia, some began to act as if the Gentile Christians were not really Christians because they did not follow the Laws of Moses. In essence, they were trying to teach that we could merit God’s favour by our actions, *thus securing our salvation*. We were, are and always will be saved by grace, not works.

This issue was finally dealt with in Acts 15, where the bare minimum required for being considered a Christian was finally “fleshed out”. According to Luke, the Jerusalem Council declared that these follow-

Progressive (Subjective) Sanctification – this is the process that begins from the moment one becomes a believer, wherein the person begins to exhibit more and more of the fruit of the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22-23) and the very fragrance of our Lord, Jesus Christ (II Corinthians 2:15-16). This (Progressive/Subjective) aspect of sanctification is guided not only by the promptings of the Holy Spirit, but also by daily lifestyle choices guided by obedience to the Word of God in context. * This Progressive sanctification is what the entire body of this book is dealing with.

Glorification - Finally, the culmination of all of this is the glorification of the believer. This will occur when the believer is finally brought into the presence of God and every bit of the “Old man” that remains will be removed. This, like the initial act of justification, is a work entirely of God.

¹² Galatians 2:14

¹³ Acts 15:1

INTRODUCTION

ing things were necessary.¹⁴

For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.

I am NOT teaching anything like those Jewish Christians did in the book of Galatians; I am not saying that you must choose not to celebrate Christmas or you will no longer be a believer. **I affirm** the fact that we are **saved by grace, not works**.

Legalism is Adding More to the Word of God or Taking Away from the Word

Jesus told us that the adding or subtracting of that which is already written in the Old and New Testaments, is also legalism. Choosing to conform to human rules and traditions, as well as novel interpretations of Scripture, rather than the plain word of God in context with the rest of the Word (we cannot have teachings that contradict the larger reading of the Bible, even if it “seems” to be what it is teaching in a given passage) would be a good working definition of the word.

I have already talked about Jesus’ views regarding traditions of people that go against the Word of God earlier in the section called, “The Truth and Our Traditions” found on page 5.

Essentially, it comes down to this, while we may not have a “black book of do’s and don’ts” in the sense of say issues like gambling, et cetera, the overreaching issue is this; even though a specific act like gambling is not expressly denounced, we know the Bible teaches basic truth, such as relying only on God for what we need; if we do not, we are sinning against Him. This is why gambling *may* be sin; if someone is choosing to gamble to get the “big one”, he or she is relying on self and ingenuity to do that which God should be doing. Gambling and self-sufficiency become idols to that person and the First com-

¹⁴ These are the words of the people who presided over the Jerusalem Council, as found in Acts 15, not mine. I am only reporting what they said.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

mandment is broken in that person's life.

As a believer who loves the Lord and wants to be more fully conformed to the image of the invisible God, I can read that Scripture clearly tells us to **flee from sexual immorality, idolatry, materialism, and evil desires**.¹⁵ If I choose not to listen and go ahead and do it anyway, God may (and often does) send others to help me to see that what I am doing is harmful to me as a believer and to the Body in general. It is not "Me and Jesus", but believers in community.

Scripture teaches that we are no longer what we once were and therefore need no longer behave as we once did.¹⁶

The New Testament Church and the World

I am not going to discuss too much how the World deals with things, but how we, as Christians, need to respond to the pure, unadulterated Word of God in its entirety. As unbelievers, the people in the world are slaves to sin. In contrast, according to Romans 6:14-23, believers are to be **slaves of righteousness**. It is our job to present our lives to Christ through the keeping of the Law of Grace.¹⁷

See I Corinthians 6:8; I Corinthians 10:12-14; I Timothy 6:6-11; and James 4:1-10 for references of these things.

¹⁶ See Romans 6:6; II Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:9-10

¹⁷ The keeping of this Law of Grace can only be accomplished through the Spirit, according to Romans 8:1-2. This passage does not mean that we do not still have a moral obligation to the Law; it is still that which identifies sin in our lives. The difference, according to Paul, is that we are no longer subject to the Law of sin and death; we are no longer under a death sentence, if we do not keep the Law. We keep the Law, not to merit salvation or to even participate in our salvation because God has done that work completely. Instead, we listen to the Word of God and follow His righteous decrees with the aid of the Holy Spirit out of thankfulness to Him. We respond to the Father in a sense as we did to our earthly fathers. If we disobeyed our earthly fathers, we knew they would still love us. That did not mean, though, that our fathers would not be

INTRODUCTION

For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? **But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.** I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. **For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.** What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. **But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.** For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.¹⁸

Our information about what we are free to do or not cannot come from our feelings, what the world thinks is okay, what other Christians allow, or from the argument of silence¹⁹.... Instead, we need to strain our traditions through the Word of God and allow His Word to renew our minds.

Remember, it was Paul who told us:

upset with us because of our disobedience to the things they said. Similarly, the Law is right and just and good. The Lord set forth the Law as His standard to convict us of sin so we would come to Him through Jesus. It is also still His standard of righteousness. I will explain more later in this book.

¹⁸ Romans 6:14-23

¹⁹ There are some within the Church who would say that because something is not expressly denounced, it is all right to do.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. **And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.** – Romans 12:1-2

With this entire preamble in our thoughts, please listen to what I believe the Word of God is saying to us, the New Testament Church in the 21st century.

2

Chapter 2: The Issue At Hand - Christmas

My Thesis

I would like to put forth the premise to the New Testament Church that the keeping of Christmas is **not only** “not necessary”, **but is actually offensive to God**, on at least a few fronts.

Clarification

Before I get started, I would like to state some things to clarify my position:

What I am NOT Saying

I am NOT saying that Jesus is not God. I believe Jesus to be the Eternal Word who is 100 percent God and 100 percent Man. He is the Second Person of the Trinity, who chose to come to earth, be born, live a sinless life, die for our sins, and redeem those who would accept Him and that which He came to do and that which the Father has sent Him to do. I base these things not on someone’s vain traditions, but on theology that is based on the Scripture in context. While the word, Trinity, for example, may not be found in Scripture, the theology is most certainly supported. Should anyone like more information on the

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

Trinity, please contact me²⁰; I would be happy to delineate the teaching, based on the Word of God in context.

I am NOT saying that His birth should not necessarily be celebrated (although the day of December 25 is not the likely date of the Birth).

I am NOT saying that every aspect of the Christmas celebration is pagan. To say that would be to say the Scriptures utilised on a regular basis discussing the birth of our Lord are pagan. This is simply not true. There are *definitely* some biblical undertones within this celebration. Where the struggle with this comes in, is in the idea that this celebration is thoroughly biblical. It is not – it isn't even close to it.

I am NOT saying that the Christians who celebrate it are pagans. Far from it. In fact, most of the people who are really enamoured of this holiday are individuals who I personally look up to in a lot of areas. These are definitely fully committed followers of Christ.

I am NOT saying that people are going to go to Hell if they don't listen; we are **saved** by grace, not works. We are to, however, live out our faith through the keeping of the Law with the help of the Holy Spirit (i.e. if this is who we are, how then, shall we live).

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. **By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.** For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world-our faith.²¹

²⁰ You can contact me by email at bill.rosanna@shaw.ca or through my distributor, Lulu.com. Make sure you indicate the name of the book and my name.

²¹ I John 5:1-4. See Also Romans 8:1-8.

THE ISSUE AT HAND: CHRISTMAS

I am NOT saying that instead, people *have* to celebrate the Biblical Feasts (at least for now)²²; that is up to the individual, based on the Romans 14 passage in its right context.²³

What I Am Saying

I am saying that we must look to the Word of God and allow it to direct our practice and worship, rather than allowing our feelings and tradition to take precedence over the truth of God in context.

I am saying that we must counter the “saved by grace” mantra that Christians today use to justify behaviour. We are saved by grace, even through this process we know as sanctification; however, our position in Christ is not an excuse to just ignore that **the Law is still the rudder for our faith and the Spirit is the one who holds the rudder.** Further, we are the ones who can choose to give the motor gas or not ... it is still our choice to either sin or not after we are saved. The keeping of the commands not to steal, commit adultery, et cetera are still standards by which a Holy God would have us live, but we must remember that we cannot use it (the Law) to be saved or even to merit grace once we have been saved. Nevertheless, it is through the Law that sin is revealed. We, through taking our thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ, are able to avoid sin itself. Our behaviours should still be in keeping with the Spirit of the Law, which still upholds the Law’s essence – and fulfills it through Christ. The motivation is one of love, not of the flesh. I desire to do what God wants me to do; I desire to conform more to His image, by rejecting the ways of the world and following Him.

I am saying that we have freedom within the confines of what Scripture DOES say. As a believer, I must still agree with the things

²² In the New Millennium, according to Zechariah 14, every nation left on the earth will have to celebrate the Feast of Booths when Jesus is on His Throne in the City of David as the King of Kings; those who do not celebrate it will end up dealing with drought.

²³ Having said that, the word pictures painted by these feasts are pretty phenomenal and make for a much fuller understanding of the OT and Jesus’ fulfillment of the promises made to all mankind.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

that God has revealed in His word; I cannot, for example, say homosexuality is all right because we live in the 21st century. Now, as then, God's word tells us that the act of homosexuality is an abomination; He loves the person, but He will *never* condone the sin, so neither should we.

A Note on Sources

Because the origins of this non-biblical “feast” stem from the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church mixed with pagan ideologies, I will certainly utilize their information more often than any other. This is simply because if they “ordained” it, surely they should be the experts on it. Aside from their perspective, I will also draw from a plethora of other sources. Most importantly, I will bring in the Bible and what it may have to say about the various practices and implements associated with the celebration.

Why I Feel Compelled to Write This Book

Many people will find this entire book to be divisive; after all, aren't we supposed to be non-judgmental and just love one another?

Honestly, sometimes I have felt that way myself; when I was a non-believer, I did whatever it took to stay under the radar. I used to love to be “just one of the crowd”. However, once I became a fully devoted follower of the Messiah, some things quickly became evident. The first thing He showed me through His word was that I needed to take the Lord *at* His word and accept it without wavering. The second thing His word made apparent was that I needed to stand for the truth of God, even when it was not the popular choice. This is not an issue of popularity or even peace (in the worldly sense), but of obedience to an all-powerful God.

It has been an interesting experience for our family since we chose to walk away from the celebration ourselves; almost consistently, we are seen by other believers as either “weaker” believers, or in some cases, heretics who are only pose as believers. One has even identified me as a “puffed up, judaizing Pharisee”.

Until relatively recently, we have really only told a few people about how we have felt for two reasons. The first reason stems from a re-

THE ISSUE AT HAND: CHRISTMAS

sponse I experienced from a professor, whom I look up to a great deal. While she stood for the word pictures of the Bible (and indeed introduced me to many of them), she maintained that the celebration of Christmas was Biblical and that I was causing other believers to question their salvation because of my questions and assertions. This was not my desire then, nor is it my desire today.

I am not saying people will lose their salvation; I *am* saying that it is offensive to God because *many elements in Christmas are anti-biblical*.

The second reason I refrained was honestly because I was afraid of what other believers might say about us – and more specifically, me. Instead, I have tried to ignore the tug on my heart every time I thought of these issues as I have read through the Word.

Over the past several years, many people have asked us why we did not celebrate the day, and we have always been evasive, in order to try to ensure that there would be no issue within the congregation we attended. This last year (2006), however, the pressure has been immense. Elders, leaders, and long-standing members have all asked us why we were choosing not to celebrate. We have even been told that if we chose to distance ourselves during the Christmas season, we were “forsaking the fellowship of the saints”. None of this is true – we just did not want to stick out, nor did we want to partake in that which we believed was inappropriate.

As well, God’s Word has a way of chipping at you until you decide to do that which He would have you do. I kept running into passages that spoke of the responsibility to speaking to people about the truth, even if they don’t want to hear it. If they respond positively, that is wonderful; if they don’t, then the responsibility is theirs.²⁴

As such, this has been written, not because I want to be a “splinter in the backside” to the people of God but because I believe that the Word of God in context actually speaks *against* the keeping of the celebration of Christmas, at least in the form it is in now.

²⁴ See Ezekiel 3:17-21 and James 5:19-20 for examples of this teaching.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

I have heard people ask me, “who are you to say”? Frankly, I am just a sinner saved by grace, like every other believer – none of us deserves the gift of salvation. At the end of the day, the reason I am speaking about Christmas is not because of pride, notoriety or anything like that. While I am far from perfect, God’s word is still the Truth. He tells us that we need to preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season²⁵ – in other words, speak it when people want to hear it and speak the truth when people don’t.

Unity comes through the **truth**, not through whitewashing things and pretending they are all right when they are not. Listen to what James tells us:

Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins. –James 5:19, 20

And

Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because you did not give him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand. Nevertheless if you warn the righteous man that the righteous should not sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; also you will have delivered your soul. – Ezekiel 3:20-21

Regardless of what you or I may think or feel, the Word of God needs to be paramount. It is with this in mind that I have decided to write this book.

Questions to Ponder

As you go through the rest of my line of reasoning throughout this book, I would like you to keep these ideas I have already mentioned in your mind; I would also like you to ponder the following questions, in light of the Word of God, and then apply the spirit of the answers to

²⁵ II Timothy 4:2

THE ISSUE AT HAND: CHRISTMAS

the subject of Christmas.

If a Christian is fully convinced that God has led him or her and that this is a “special circumstance”, is it ever “okay” to commit adultery? Covet his/her neighbour’s stuff? Murder another person?

If we denounce adultery, fornication, and/or homosexuality as abominations to God, will this cause non-believers to be offended? Should we ignore the issues in order to draw them in or should we deal with these issues as they come up?

If a non-believer is truly sincere in what they believe, is it all right for them to reject the teachings of the Bible and still be able to get to heaven?

What does it mean to be People of the Book? Are Evangelicals supposed to hold the Bible as the ultimate source of truth?

Is the silence of Scripture enough to allow or disallow a practice?

Is the argument “God has used/blessed it” enough proof for a Christian to have the freedom to do things that were formerly considered inappropriate in Scripture?

Is divorce and remarriage really okay even outside the strictures given by Jesus and Paul²⁶, since God sometimes uses it to bring people closer to Him through circumstances?

Are there any guidelines about what is permissible in worship or is it truly up to us in every manner? Here are some more questions that I myself have had to ask in order to even begin to answer this question:

1. Can I bring in eastern meditation-style stuff and integrate it with Christian worship or does this smack of syncretism (mixing paganism and Christianity)?
2. Are the very dark practices and rites performed in the Mormon temple “acceptable”, since they are done “to the Lord?”
3. Are syncretistic practices no longer off limits? Are we free to in-

²⁶ Adultery or in the case of a non-believing wife/husband leaving the believing spouse.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

tegrate satanic symbols, for example, as our own into our worship to the Holy One of Israel?

4. In our New Testament freedom, is there a right way to worship or does it matter?
 - a. If there is no “right” way, then why do we bother contending for the essentials of the faith?
 - b. Is God Holy? What does holy mean?
 - i. Does His holiness demand pure, unspotted worship or now that Jesus has paid the price are we free to worship in any way we desire?
 - ii. What does “All things are lawful” mean? Does this mean that we can choose to sin?
5. Are we in the business as believers to see how close we can skate to the edge of the precipice of sin or are we as believers supposed to try to stay as far away from the edge of that cliff as possible?

Am I the Only One?

It has certainly been a journey... recently, just before I began to write this book, I shared some of my concerns that I have about Christmas with my closest friends. Many logically see the concern, but just as many of these people are afraid that the things I am advocating are not orthodox. In fact, some have worried that these ideas border on heresy.

One of my brothers in the Lord asked a question about my conjecture, “Rosanna, if this [Christmas] is so inappropriate, why do you seem to be the only one around who even mentions such things?” Another remarked that the things I was saying sounded astonishingly similar to the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

These are good questions; questions that need to be addressed.

Some Others

Historically, many of the people in Christendom rejected Christmas as a creation of the Roman Catholic Church; it was seen to have too many unbiblical aspects to it. People like Charles Haddon Spurgeon²⁷,

²⁷ <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/1026.htm>

THE ISSUE AT HAND: CHRISTMAS

John Knox²⁸, John Calvin²⁹, A.W. Pink³⁰, and a host of other Reformers said that Christmas (as well as many other man-made feast days) was something to be avoided. Some, like Spurgeon and Calvin were less vocal than others, and Spurgeon even preached a few “Christmas” Sermons” ; nevertheless, they made it clear that the non-biblical aspects of these holidays were to be avoided.

Regarding Christmas and other “Feast Days”, John Calvin had this to say,

I know how difficult it is to persuade the world that God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by His Word. The opposite persuasion which cleaves to them, being seated, as it were, in their very bones and marrow, is, that whatever they do has in itself a sufficient sanction, provided it exhibits some kind of zeal for the honor of God. But since God not only regards as frivolous, but also plainly abominates, whatever we undertake from zeal to His worship, if at variance with His command, what do we gain by a contrary course? The words of God are clear and distinct, "Obedience is better than sacrifice." "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men," 1 Sam. 15:22; Matt. 15:9. Every addition of His word, especially in this matter, is a lie. Mere "will worship" (ethelothreeskia) is vanity [Col. 2:23]. This is the decision, and when once the judge has decided, it is no longer time to debate.³¹

Calvin also discusses this principle in his commentary on Jeremiah 7:31:

Which I commanded them not, and which never came to my mind. This reason ought to be carefully noticed, for God here cuts off from men every occasion for making evasions, since he condemns by this one phrase, "I have not com-

²⁸ http://www.sounddoctrine.net/Classic_Sermons/John%20Knox/knox.html

²⁹ http://www.swrb.ab.ca/newslett/actualNLS/NRC_ch00.htm

³⁰ <http://www.swrb.com/newslett/actualNLS/CHRISTMAS-AWPINK.htm>

³¹ Calvin, John. *Tracts* 1844 . Volume 1. Reprint Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983. Pp. 128-29.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

manded them," whatever the Jews devised. There is then no other argument needed to condemn superstitions, than that they are not commanded by God: for when men allow themselves to worship God according to their own fancies, and attend not to his commands, they pervert true religion. And if this principle was adopted by the Papists, all those fictitious modes of worship, in which they absurdly exercise themselves, would fall to the ground. It is indeed a horrible thing for the Papists to seek to discharge their duties towards God by performing their own superstitions. There is an immense number of them, as it is well known, and as it manifestly appears. Were they to admit this principle, that we cannot rightly worship God except by obeying his word, they would be delivered from their deep abyss of error. The Prophet's words then are very important, when he says, that God had commanded no such thing, and that it never came to his mind; as though he had said, that men assume too much wisdom, when they devise what he never required, nay, what he never knew. It is indeed certain, that there was nothing hid from God, even before it was done: but God here assumes the character of man, as though he had said, that what the Jews devised was unknown to him, as his own law was sufficient.

Now, as the words Tophet and Gehenna were so stigmatized by the prophets, we may hence learn how displeasing to God is every idolatry and profanation of his true and pure worship: for he compares these notorious places in which the Jews performed so sedulously their devotions, to the infernal regions. And hence at this day, when the Papists boast of what they call their devotions, we may justly say, that there are as many gates, through which they throw themselves headlong into hell, as there are modes of worship devised by them for the purpose of conciliating God.³²

Within the Puritan movement, the entire body of believers refused to celebrate anything not specifically outlined in the Scriptures.

³² Calvin, John. *Commentary on Jeremiah and Lamentations Volume 1*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Grand Rapids, MI. v1.0. January 20, 2006.
<http://www.ccel.org/c/calvin/comment3/comm_vol17/htm/xvii.xvi.htm
> URL November 24, 1999.

THE ISSUE AT HAND: CHRISTMAS

For some time, the celebration of Christmas was even outlawed in England; when the Puritans came to America, the celebration of Christmas did not come with them; in fact, it was not until the Dutch came that the celebration of Christmas was imported to the Americas.

Kevin Reed from *Still Water Revival Books* here in Alberta has spent a great deal of time studying the history of the Christian Church and its aversion to the holiday. Regarding the Puritans coming to power in England, he recounts:

When the Puritans came to power in England, attention was repeatedly given to Christmas. In 1644, December 25 fell upon a day previously scheduled for a monthly fast. The Parliament debated the issue and resolved to observe the day with fasting and prayer, especially due to the present circumstances of the nation.

In June 1647, Parliament passed legislation abolishing Christmas and other holidays:

Forasmuch as the feast of the nativity of Christ, Easter, Whitsuntide, and other festivals, commonly called holy-days, have been heretofore superstitiously used and observed; be it ordained, that the said feasts, and all other festivals, commonly called holy-days, be no longer observed as festivals; any law, statute, custom, constitution, or canon, to the contrary in anywise notwithstanding.³³

Even within the Westminster Confession, the outlawing of any non-ordained worship day was alluded to.

God alone is Lord of the conscience, and has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men that are in any thing contrary to his Word, or beside it in matters of faith on worship. So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such

³³ Neal, Daniel. *The History of the Puritans* London Vol. II. , 1837. Reprint Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1979. Page 458. As quoted on the website, *Christmas: A Biblical Critique*. "Christmas: An Historical Survey Regarding Its Origins and Opposition to It." *Presbyterian Heritage Publications*.

<http://www.swrb.com/newslett/actualNLs/Xmas_ch2.htm> January 12, 2006.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

commandments out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience; and the requiring an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also.³⁴

In the Acts of the General Assembly of Church of Scotland on Festival Days, they did not just simply seek to reform Ecclesial worship days, but to utterly abolish them.

December 10, Session 17, 1638.

And next in particular, concerning festival days findeth that in the explication of the first head of the first book of discipline it was thought good that the feasts of Christmas, Circumcision, Epiphany, with the feasts of the Apostles, Martyrs and Virgin Mary be **utterly abolished** because they are neither commanded nor warranted by Scripture and that such as observe them be punished by Civil Magistrates. **Here utter abolition is craved and not reformation of abuses only and that because the observation of such feasts have no warrant from the word of God.** [my emphases]³⁵

Even today, there are many Bible-believing followers of Christ who oppose the celebration of Christmas. Among them are independent Baptists, Presbyterians, Messianic believers and others. Here is a short list of just some of the churches/people groups who have chosen to reject the celebration of Christmas.

- Landmark Independent Church³⁶

³⁴ Brachter, Dennis, ed. *The Westminster Confession (1646)*. CRI / Voice, Institute. January 20, 2006. <<http://www.cresourcei.org/creedwestminster.html#Chapter%2020>>. December 24, 2005. Chapter 20 Section 2.

³⁵ *The Acts of the General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland*. Still Water Revival Books, 1997. pp. 37-38. As quoted on the website, "Against Pagan and Roman Catholic Holy-Days." *Still Water Revival Books Website*, January 12, 2006. <<http://www.swrb.com/newslett/freebook/holyday.htm>>, January 2006.

³⁶ <http://users.aol.com/libcfl/>

THE ISSUE AT HAND: CHRISTMAS

- Loughbrickland Reformed Presbyterian Church³⁷
- Studying the Word of God Website (Doctrinal Statement)³⁸
- Bully Creek Baptist Ministries³⁹
- Still Water Revival Books⁴⁰
- Beth Shechinah (a Messianic Christian congregation here in Calgary AB).⁴¹

When I have given this short list to some within the church, they have responded by saying that these represent the “fringe” of Christendom and utilize their doctrinal stances as “fences to keep out other born-again believers”; they are ‘sectarian’ in these peoples’ view.

I replied to these people by reminding them that John Calvin, Spurgeon, Huss, Wycliffe and a myriad of others were also considered to be “sectarian” and downright “heathen” for choosing to confess the simple Gospel without adding in all of the extra baggage we have in most of our churches today. Should not the Word of God govern our faith and behaviour?

My understanding about our harmony in the Church should be based not on feelings, but upon the truth – the truth that is laid out in the Word.

I then asked if they thought Luther, Calvin, Huss, Wycliffe and et al were “sectarian” and “unloving”? Our “oneness in Christ” must be based on Truth, not goodwill feelings.

Truth divides. Scriptural doctrine divides. That is a reality. The Truth is really, really offensive.

³⁷ <http://www.loughbrickland.org/articles/mass-easter.shtml>

³⁸ <http://www.biblestudying.net/christmas.html>

³⁹ <http://www.independent-baptists.org/article5.html>

⁴⁰ <http://www.swrb.com/>

⁴¹ http://www.bethshechinah.com/Articles/03/ViewOfChristmas_1.html

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

Jesus Himself declared,

Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.' He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it. He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.⁴²

Recently in a sermon preached to an international audience, John MacArthur said this about our lack of ability in North America to think in terms of Scriptural absolutes, to look at the world from the perspective of Scriptural teaching:

This ... climate of continuum thinking has contributed to the climate where discernment is unnecessary, unthinkable, and to pursue it is foolish, to pursue it is divisive, are you ready for this? And to pursue it is evil. You're an evil person if you draw lines. You're an evil person if you think in absolutes. You're an evil person if you have convictions. Discernment can only thrive in an environment of doctrinal absolutes.⁴³

Interestingly, even the Chicago Tribune discussed the phenomenon of some choosing to abstain from partaking in Christmas (from a decidedly non-Christian perspective) this past year:

Followers of Reformation leader John Calvin argued that Christmas was unbiblical. Like Pastor Carrasco in Echo Park, they also decried how Christmas was being observed. In 1647, Oliver Cromwell persuaded the British Parliament to make the holiday illegal, terming it both "papist and pagan." The law didn't last.

⁴² Matthew 10:34-40

⁴³ MacArthur, Dr. John. Audio Sermon. *Grace to You*. "A Call for Discernment, Part 1". Broadcasted on February 21, 2006.

THE ISSUE AT HAND: CHRISTMAS

C.H. Spurgeon, a famous Baptist preacher at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, declared in 1871: "We have no superstitious regard for times and seasons. Certainly we do not believe in the present ecclesiastical arrangement called Christmas."⁴⁴

The Chicago Tribune also included non-Christian religions in their delineation of the history of abstaining from Christmas; however, my point is, it is clear that the concern over Christmas is one that has historical precedence within the Body of Christ.

Calvin and Luther: Opposing Ideologies

Much of the root of the two different perspectives on this issue can be found in the underlying theology of John Calvin and Martin Luther. Generally speaking, Christians tend to follow one or the other perspective on this issue. I have seen (and heard in Bible College and Seminary)⁴⁵ these two perspectives presented in a very real fashion within the Body of Christ.

In essence, the difference between them is this: John Calvin would say that if something is not *specifically ordained* in the Scriptures, we should not be incorporating it into our worship to God. Martin Luther, however, would have said that if something was *not specifically outlawed* in the Word of God, we as believers have freedom to pursue and incorporate whatever that "something" is into our worship to God.

Calvin – Worship Okay Only If Sanctioned in Scripture

One of the questions this brings up, then, is which is the more Biblical approach? Some would completely dismiss John Calvin's approach of

⁴⁴ Stammer, Larry B. "Taking the Christmas Out of Christ. (December 21, 2005)" *The Chicago Tribune Online*. Thursday, January 12, 2006. <<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/la-me-xmas21dec21.1.4002672.print.story?coll=chi-news-hed&ctrack=1&cset=true>> The Los Angeles Times, 2006.

⁴⁵ One of my professors dubbed John Calvin "Scrooge" and Martin Luther "Cratchett", regarding their "Christmas Spirit" – or lack thereof.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

worship because it is too restrictive. One of the arguments used to discount the perspective goes something like this:

Well, if it is not in the Bible, as Calvin says, we can't do it. I guess we can't even take a car to Church. Guess you will have to resort to being a member of the Amish to truly follow this system.

I am exaggerating here a bit, but I have heard this basic line of reasoning to discount Calvin's stance. Here are the problems with this particular argument; driving the car here, there, or anywhere else has little to do with the format of worship we choose, first of all. Secondly, the thing that Calvin was trying to express was not the restrictiveness of Scripture, but what he and others who came after him would have called the "Regulatory Principle of Scripture". In the Word of God, there are underlying basic premises that run throughout the entire Book. Paul even uses an example of such a thing. In I Corinthians 9:9, Paul recounts that in the Law of Moses, it is said, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads the grain". He then goes on to explain that there is an overarching principle that governs the scripture. It is not necessarily about the ox at all, but about fairness in one's practices. Paul explains to the Corinthian church that if one does the work, he/she deserves a portion of wages/remuneration for their work.

The same thing goes for the idea of the Regulative Principle. We would have no issue, necessarily for example, with choosing to have more contemporary-sounding music versus traditional hymns, since Scripture would tell us that we are to "let everything that has breath Praise the Lord"⁴⁶ and to "sing unto the LORD a new song".⁴⁷ However, if we were to incorporate non-biblical words or concepts into this music, or worldly behaviour while playing the music, we will have violated the Regulative Principle. It's not about the letter of the Law, per se but the Spirit behind the Law.

⁴⁶ Psalm 150:6

⁴⁷ Psalm 33:3; Revelation 5:9; 14:3

THE ISSUE AT HAND: CHRISTMAS

Luther – Worship Okay If It is Not Specifically Denounced in Scripture

Likewise, while people point to Martin Luther as the one who said it was all right to incorporate something as long as it was not specifically disallowed, if it were clearly shown that principles pertaining to Christmas violated some of the Scriptures, my guess is that even Martin Luther would have tossed it out. This was the basis of his 95 Theses at Wittenberg. He saw that there were gross injustices done to the Scriptures, not only in the area of salvation, but in many other areas of the Church. It was because of this that he decided that he needed to stand up against the “powers that be”.

Luther may have seen freedom in worship, but as far as I can ascertain from his writings, he would never have knowingly incorporated the Renaissance equivalent of voodoo or something like that into worship to the Lord. From my research, much of his perspective came from a place of ignorance (lack of knowledge) regarding backgrounds of things such as Christmas. Additionally, he was not quite willing to give up every aspect of the ecclesiology and polity of the church that he had spent his entire adult life serving, in spite of the hardships he encountered.⁴⁸

Which Opinion is Right?

No matter which of these opinions seems to be the most logical to us, we need to remember that all opinions need to be strained through the Word of God. So what does the Bible have to say about allowing things outside of the Word (or in addition to what the Word allows)?

⁴⁸ There were many things about Martin Luther that were less than perfect, just like in our own cases. Each of us has some areas in our lives that are still in darkness with respect to the truth of God. That does not mean we are somehow less saved. We are all in the process of being sanctified – being made holy – and not one of us will have realised that goal until we are on the other side of our last breath in the presence of the Lord Himself. However, we also need to ensure that when someone presents another aspect of the Truth, we respond to it, rather than ignore it.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

There are several verses in Scripture that point us to a clear theology regarding whether or not “freedom of worship” includes the liberty to add (or subtract) commands, holidays, and other things to “the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints”⁴⁹. To begin with, we can read the clear command given by Yahweh to the Israelites when they were first allowed to possess *ha aretz* – the land (of Israel).

Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you. **You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.**⁵⁰

When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.' You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. **Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.**⁵¹

The concept of not adding to that which God has already spoken to His people is found in other passages, as well.

Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, Lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar.⁵²

⁴⁹ Jude 1:3b

⁵⁰ Deuteronomy 4:1-2

⁵¹ Deuteronomy 12:29-32

⁵² Proverbs 30:5, 6

THE ISSUE AT HAND: CHRISTMAS

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.⁵³

The entirety of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever.⁵⁴

For those who would try to say that these only pertain to the “Old Covenant”, which has passed away, I would like to remind you of a couple of things:

1. Paul, Peter, James, Jude, et al only had the *Old Testament* to prove or validate the things that were said regarding their faith. Therefore, when Paul told Timothy, “*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work*”,⁵⁵ he was not referring to his own writings (although they are also undoubtedly scripture), but to the books we now know as the Old Testament. As such, it seems more than a little foolish to completely ignore this.
2. Jesus affirmed that people were to continue to listen to Jesus’ commands, which are actually the commands of the Father and even made it clear that if we choose to be lawless, we will be utterly rejected by the Father.

If you love Me, keep My commandments.... Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. *He who does not love Me does not keep My*

⁵³ Joshua 1:8-9

⁵⁴ Psalm 119:160

⁵⁵ II Timothy 3:16, 17

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

*words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me.*⁵⁶

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, ***'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'***⁵⁷

In trying to correct many errors within the Corinthian church, Paul discusses the concept of staying within the confines of the written text as believers:

Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, ***that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written***, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other. – I Corinthians 4:6

As you read through the remainder of the book, keep in mind the primary theme and compare it with the Word of God. If after you are done reading this book, you are honestly, without reservation, able to continue in the practice of Christmas, fair enough. However, if the words in this book echo true in your heart, then I would ask you that you would stop using the excuse of freedom in worship to continue to partake in this holiday.

⁵⁶ John 14:15, 23-24

⁵⁷ Matthew 7:22-24

SECTION II

WHAT IS CHRISTMAS ABOUT?

Over the past 10 years, my family and I have been pondering the celebration of Christmas in light of the Scriptures.

Generally speaking, it has been my observation that often, believers and non-believers celebrate it because it is fun, it is what they grew up with (that is, it is the tradition of their families or churches or both), and for many, it seems to honour Jesus and awaken non-believers to the “truth” that it was Jesus who was born on that day. To that end, Evangelicals throughout the land have sounded the seemingly pious cry, “Let’s keep Christ in Christmas”.

Truly, Christmas has been celebrated by Christians off and on since the 400’s.⁵⁸

“So what’s wrong with it” many may ask. Some may even be saying, “Well it *is* His birthday, after all; why should we not celebrate it?” I was, honestly, one of those people before I began to research this

⁵⁸ There were a very few who were said to have celebrated it as early as 200 AD, but still, this is a full 160 plus years post-Jesus. Also, the name was a later invention, which we will see later.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

topic, both from the perspective of Scripture and history.

Here is the crux of the issue; *if* Christmas does *not go against things set forth by the Word of God*, then, yes, we **are** free to celebrate it; however, *if it does go against* the basic premises set forth in Scripture, **we are not free to celebrate it**, no matter how enticing it is.

Let's take a look at the origin of Christmas. First of all, we will look at the perspective of the Roman Catholic Church, since they were the ones who were in power at the time of the inception of this celebration.

3

Chapter 3: Origin of the Word Itself

In their article on “Christmas”, the *Catholic Encyclopedia* tells us that the word itself comes from the central teaching in the Roman Catholic worship; that of the Mass. Listen to their own explanation:

The word for Christmas in late Old English is Cristes Maesse, the Mass of Christ, first found in 1038, and Cristes-messe, in 1131. In Dutch it is Kerst-misse, in Latin Dies Natalis, whence comes the French Noël, and Italian Il natale; in German Weihnachtsfest, from the preceeding sacred vigil. The term Yule is of disputed origin. It is unconnected with any word meaning "wheel". The name in Anglo-Saxon was geol, feast: geola, the name of a month (cf. Icelandic iol a feast in December).⁵⁹

They go on to explain that this name, from whence we get the title of this celebration, was not coined until at least the 11th century. “What does it matter”, many will ask. Most are not aware of the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, when it comes to what they believe the

⁵⁹ Martindale, Cyril. *The Catholic Encyclopedia Volume III*. “Christmas”. Ed. Robert Appleton Company, 1908. Online: <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03724b.htm>> Ed. K. Knight, 2003.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

Mass really *is*.

Okay, So What is the Mass?

According to their article, "Liturgy of the Mass", the *Catholic Encyclopedia* tells us that "the Mass is the complex [system] of prayers and ceremonies **that make up the service of the Eucharist** in the Latin rites. As in the case of all liturgical terms the name is less old than the thing."⁶⁰

So here we need to go down a "bunny trail" to get to the heart of the matter....

In another article, the "Sacrifice of the Mass", the *Catholic Encyclopedia* says this;

Of these the most important is that the Church intends the Mass to be regarded as a "true and proper sacrifice", and will not tolerate the idea that the sacrifice is identical with Holy Communion. That is the sense of a clause from the Council of Trent (Sess. XXII, can. 1): "If any one saith that in the Mass a true and proper sacrifice is not offered to God; or, that to be offered is nothing else but that Christ is given us to eat; let him be anathema" (Denzinger, "Enchir.", 10th ed. 1908, n. 948). When Leo XIII in the dogmatic Bull "Apostolicae Curae" of 13 Sept., 1896, based the invalidity of the Anglican form of consecration on the fact among others, that in the consecrating formula of Edward VI (that is, since 1549) there is nowhere an unambiguous declaration regarding the Sacrifice of the Mass, the Anglican archbishops answered with some irritation: "First, we offer the Sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving; next, we plead and represent before the Father the Sacrifice of the Cross . . . and, lastly, we offer the Sacrifice of ourselves to the Creator of all things, which we have already signified by the oblation of His creatures.... But even if they were all so accustomed, they would have to interpret the terms in the sense of the thirty-nine Articles, which deny **both the Real Presence and the sacrificial power of the priest, and thus admit a sacrifice in an unreal or figurative sense only**. Leo XIII, on the

⁶⁰ Fortescue, Adrian. *The Catholic Encyclopedia Volume IX*. "Liturgy of the Mass". Ed. Robert Appleton Company, 1908. Online: <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09790b.htm>> Ed. K. Knight, 2003.

ORIGIN OF THE WORD ITSELF

other hand, in union with the whole Christian past, had in mind in the above-mentioned Bull **nothing else than the Eucharistic "Sacrifice of the true Body and Blood of Christ" on the altar. This Sacrifice is certainly not identical with the Anglican form of celebration.**⁶¹

The Mass of the Roman Catholic Church is basically the vehicle for what they believe is the **sacrifice of Christ**. It is centred upon the idea that whenever they celebrate the "Lord's Supper" or "Eucharist" that they actually call down Jesus from heaven and continue the sacrifice of the Cross. Without this "essential" continuation, the Roman Catholic Church believes that sins cannot be forgiven and other "graces" cannot be conferred to the faithful.

Paragraphs 1392-1397 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tell believers that the taking of the Eucharist "preserves, increases, and renews the life of grace received at Baptism",⁶² it "... separates us from sin ...",⁶³ it "... strengthens our charity, which tends to be weakened in daily life; and this living charity wipes away venial sins",⁶⁴ it "... preserves us from future mortal sins ...",⁶⁵ it "... renews, strengthens, and deepens this incorporation into the Church, already achieved by Baptism ... Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread ..."⁶⁶ and it "... commits us to the poor".⁶⁷ All of these things are said to be done, apart from the

⁶¹ Pohle, J. *The Catholic Encyclopedia Volume III*. "Sacrifice of the Mass". Ed. Robert Appleton Company, 1908. Online: <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10006a.htm>> Ed. K. Knight, 2003.

⁶² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. "The Celebration of the Christian Mystery" (Ontario: Doubleday 1995), Pg. 389, para. 1392.

⁶³ Ibid, pg. 390, para. 1393.

⁶⁴ Ibid, pg. 390, para. 1394.

⁶⁵ Ibid, pg. 390, para. 1395.

⁶⁶ Ibid, pg. 391, para. 1396.

⁶⁷ Ibid, pg. 391, para. 1397.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

faith of the believer; the Bread and the Wine alone produce all benefits listed.

They are clear about the idea that this teaching is *much* more than we non-Catholics make it out to be, even those of the Anglican persuasion.... When we receive communion, most believers do not give a second thought to the fact that we believe it is a *memorial* to remind us of Christ until His return. If we think of Jesus' sacrifice, we believe Jesus' own words on the Cross; "**It is Finished**",⁶⁸ *not* "it continues indefinitely".

This is not how the Roman Catholic Church sees things at all. In fact, they believe in a connected teaching, called "Transubstantiation".

Transub – WHAT?

Transubstantiation is a teaching that has been around for centuries; the word itself comes from the Latin words, *trans* (*across*) and *substantia* (*substance*). The *Oxford Paperback Encyclopaedia* tells its readers that transubstantiation is "the Christian doctrine that the bread and wine used in the sacrament of the Eucharist are **transformed into the body and blood of Christ, who is therefore present at the Mass**".⁶⁹

According to the latest version of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, within the Eucharist, "the **whole** Christ is truly, really and substantially contained".⁷⁰

Further, in expressing the essence of the teaching of transubstantiation within the elements of the Eucharist, the *Council of Trent* is cited:

Because Christ our Redeemer said that it was truly his body

⁶⁸ So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit. – John 19:30

⁶⁹ *Oxford Bookback Encyclopaedia*, "Transubstantiation". Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1998.

⁷⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. "The Celebration of the Christian Mystery". Ontario: Doubleday. 1995. p. 383; par 1374.

ORIGIN OF THE WORD ITSELF

that he was offering under the species of bread, it has always been the conviction of God's Church ... that by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation.⁷¹

They truly believe in the Mass, through the Eucharist, “a real sacrifice is again offered by Christ on behalf of the worshipers in the same sense as was the crucifixion.”⁷²

This concept of transubstantiation was first outlined (within an entirely different context, of course) by the Greek philosopher, Aristotle. Later, the idea was seized and applied within the framework of the Catholic teaching of the Mass and the place of the “Eucharist” in that Mass.

Another Anti-Biblical Teaching

Coexisting with these two teachings is that of another which I have already alluded to, “*sacerdotalism*”, which is “the idea that a properly ordained priest must be present to consecrate the host”⁷³ and that “the bread and wine are transformed at the moment the priest pronounces the words”.⁷⁴

So What

The Mass Goes Against Scripture in Context

So then, to sum it up, when a “duly appointed minister” blesses the

⁷¹ Council of Trent (1551), as cited in *Catechism*, p. 385; par. 1376.

⁷² Erickson, Millard. J. *Christian Theology*. Second Edition. Michigan; Baker. 1998. Pg. 1124.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 1125.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

bread and wine, the elements of bread and wine actually *change in their substance*, while remaining in essence (accidents; that is, taste, smell, feel, et cetera), bread and wine. They are said to turn into the real body and the real blood of Jesus, so believers are to participate in a form of cannibalism⁷⁵ and then drink the blood of their Saviour.

The Roman Catholic Church would cite Jesus' words as proof for their practice:

Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."⁷⁶

One of the first rules of Hermeneutics⁷⁷ *is* if it makes sense, seek no other sense. Sometimes, though, the simple reading doesn't agree with other passages in the Bible. In the case of the John passage, if we are to take it literally, it goes against all of the Old Testament verses that tell us not to ingest blood *and* it is also in direct opposition to the decree made by the Holy Spirit in Acts 15:28-29. Here was the first Council ever held by the Church. In this Council, the people were trying to determine what the minimum was to be considered "a Christian". These were considered to be essential to the identification of what a Christian is.

For it **seemed good to the Holy Spirit**, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these **necessary** things: that **you abstain** from things offered to idols, **from blood**, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.⁷⁸

Another rule of the Word is that Scripture should illuminate or make

⁷⁵ The technical term for this doctrine is called, *manducation*.

⁷⁶ John 6:53, 54

⁷⁷ The art of how to find the original intent of a Biblical passage and the application to life even today.

⁷⁸ Acts 15:28-29

ORIGIN OF THE WORD ITSELF

clear Scripture *and* none of the Scriptures should contradict each other. Furthermore, **we know that Jesus would never teach something that was in direct opposition to either the Father or the Spirit.** Given these facts, the plain reading of the John passage cannot be right; instead, it should be taken metaphorically, just as many other of His statements are taken metaphorically (I am the Door, I am the Bread of Life, I am the Light of the World, et cetera).

As such, the act of the Mass is profane, according to the teaching of the Word of God and the command of the Holy Spirit, since it teaches that the participants literally eat Jesus' body and drink His blood.

We Should Honour Him Even in the Name of Celebrations We Keep

My question to those who are reading is this, "If we **must** celebrate His birth on December 25th, why would we allow the celebration of the Birth of Our Saviour to be named after such a blasphemous practice?"

At the **very least**, it should **not** be named such, as this name represents a departure from His central message. His sacrifice happened **once** for **all**. It need not be repeated. Listen to the Book of Hebrews on this matter:

For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; **not that He should offer Himself often**, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another-He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, **once** at the end of the ages, **He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.** And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.⁷⁹

Many even within our church say that this is a great opportunity to

⁷⁹ Hebrews 9:24 – 28

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

spread the gospel; the fact is, the very notion of the Mass is hostile to **the basic teachings of the Gospel**. Jesus died ONCE for all and he is now seated at the Right hand of the Father.⁸⁰ It is a finished work; His sacrifice is complete; it need not continue. How, then, does the name of this celebration square with the Gospel? It doesn't.

It certainly takes the Evangelical cry, "*Let's keep Christ in Christmas*" and puts it into a different light....

One of the arguments I came across recently regarding the name was this, "It is just semantics, Rosanna. No matter what day you choose to celebrate His birth, it is Christmas." There is a problem with this line of thinking; as we discovered earlier, the celebration's name, "Christmas", was not given until the 11th century. However, a little later on in the book, we will find out that the inception of the holiday began in the 4th century. As such, the name, "Christmas" is not a generic word at all, but a word that was chosen specifically for this day. Furthermore, the name refers to the act of the Mass of Christ, not just the celebration of remembrance of His incarnation (birth).

(For those who are interested, feel free to contact me for the information I have gathered regarding the various traditions surrounding the Lord's Supper.)⁸¹

⁸⁰ God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, **when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.** – Hebrews 11:4 (notice, this is a completed action, not a continuous one; it is done, it doesn't continue)

⁸¹ You can contact me by email at bill.rosanna@shaw.ca or through my distributor, Lulu.com. Make sure you indicate the name of the book and my name.

4

Chapter 4: Early Celebration

Okay. So we have established that the name itself is perhaps not the best choice. Many would say this is a small issue that could be resolved, while retaining the bulk of what Christians choose to celebrate. All right then; let us take a look at the earliest celebrations and what the Official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church is about this celebration. Remember, the reality is, we have taken many of our cues from them, so it is logical to at least listen to what they have to say about the celebration. They spend literally pages talking about each major area of the world, from Jerusalem to Mesopotamia to Rome.

I have taken but a small portion of what they say to give you an idea of their reasoning:

Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the Church. Irenaeus and Tertullian omit it from their lists of feasts The first evidence of the feast is from Egypt. About A.D. 200, Clement of Alexandria (Strom., I, xxi in P.G., VIII, 888) says that certain Egyptian theologians "over curiously" assign, not the year alone, but the day of Christ's birth, placing it on 25 Pachon (20 May) in the twenty-eighth year of Augustus. Others reached the date of 24 or 25 Pharmuthi (19 or 20 April). ... Cyril of Alexandria, and his sermons (see Mansi, IV, 293; appendix to Act. Conc. Eph.) show that the December celebration was then firmly established there, and calendars prove its permanence. **The**

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

December feast therefore reached Egypt between 427 and 433.... In 385, ... 25 December was not observed at Jerusalem.... Jerome, writing about 411 (in Ezech., P.L., XXV, 18), reproves Palestine for keeping Christ's birthday (when He hid Himself) on the Manifestation feast. Cosmas Indicopleustes suggests (P.G., LXXXVIII, 197) that even in the middle of the sixth century Jerusalem was peculiar in combining the two commemorations, arguing from Luke 3:23 that Christ's baptism day was the anniversary of His birthday.... More important, but scarcely better accredited, is Erbes' contention (Zeitschrift f. Kirchengesch., XXVI, 1905, 20-31) that the feast was brought in by Constantine as early as 330-35.⁸²

This is just the beginning, people. It gets better....

⁸² Martindale, Cyril. *The Catholic Encyclopedia Volume III*. "Christmas". Ed. Robert Appleton Company, 1908. Online: <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03724b.htm>> Ed. K. Knight. 2003.

5

Chapter 5: Why Did We Set This Date?

The Catholic Perspective

When dealing with the origins of the Feast of Christmas, many theories abound. *The Catholic Encyclopaedia* discusses these possibilities:

The well-known solar feast, however, of *Natalis Invicti*, celebrated on 25 December, has a strong claim on the responsibility for our December date. For the history of the solar cult, its position in the Roman Empire, and syncretism with Mithraism, see Cumont's epoch-making "Textes et Monuments" etc., I, ii, 4, 6, p. 355. Mommsen (*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, 12, p. 338) has collected the evidence for the feast, which reached its climax of popularity under Aurelian in 274. ... But even should a deliberate and legitimate "baptism" of a pagan feast be seen here no more than the transference of the date need be supposed. The "mountain-birth" of Mithra and Christ's in the "grotto" have nothing in common: Mithra's adoring shepherds (Cumont, op. cit., I, ii, 4, p. 304 sqq.) are rather borrowed from Christian sources than vice versa. ... The present writer is inclined to think that, be the origin of the feast in East or West, and though the abundance of analogous midwinter festivals may indefinitely have helped the choice of the December date, the same instinct which set *Natalis Invicti* at the winter solstice will have sufficed, apart from deliberate adaptation or curious calculation, to set the Christian feast

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

there too.⁸³

The author of this article concludes that the midwinter festivals at least had SOME influence on the choice of the date and the reason for the festival at all....

In a summation of the feasts of the church, the Encyclopedia had this to say

Prototypes and starting-points for the oldest ecclesiastical feasts are the Jewish solemnities of Easter and Pentecost. Together with the weekly Lord's Day, they remained the only universal Christian feasts down to the third century (Tertullian, "De Bapt." 19: Origen, "Contra Celsum", VIII, 22). Two feasts of Our Lord (Epiphany, Christmas) were added in the fourth century; then came the feasts of the Apostles and martyrs, in particular provinces; later on also those of some confessors (St. Martin, St. Gregory); in the sixth and seventh centuries feasts of the Blessed Virgin were added.⁸⁴

One needs to realize, by the way, that this conclusion is not only the idea of the writer of the article itself. In the Catholic belief system, nothing may be accepted as "truth" unless it receives the "official okay" of the leadership. This document and the entire set of encyclopaedias received this distinction in 1908.⁸⁵ In essence, in the Roman Catholic economy, nothing can be printed unless it is scrutinised and accepted as orthodoxy⁸⁶ by the leadership. This set of encyclopaedias not only received approval from the local Bishop, but by the entire Catholic Ecclesial Leadership.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Holweck, F. G. *The Catholic Encyclopedia Volume VI*. "Ecclesiastical Feasts". Ed. Robert Appleton Company, 1908. Online: <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03724b.htm>> Ed. K. Knight. 2003.

⁸⁵ Nihil Obstat, November 1, 1908. Remy Lafort, S.T.D., Censor Imprimatur. +John Cardinal Farley, Archbishop of New York.

⁸⁶ Essentially, "right belief"

WHY DID WE SET THIS DATE?

Two Evangelical Perspectives

We have taken a fleeting look at what the Roman Catholic Church has to say about where the Christmas celebration comes from and why the date of December 25th was chosen; however, we have not even begun to scratch the surface. What do other Evangelicals have to say about this celebration? What do they say the origin of this celebration is?

The *Church History Institute* (an Alliance Member of Gospelcom.net) gives a quick run-down of the history of the celebration of Christ. In their bulletin inserts that they offer to Evangelical Christendom everywhere, they recount:

.... By the fourth century, however, many Christian groups had begun to observe Christ's birthday, though the day chosen for the celebration differed from place to place. Christians in the East generally celebrated on January 6; those in the West on December 25. Others set dates in March, April, or May. About 350 AD, Pope Julius set December 25 as the date of Jesus' birth. This corresponded with the Roman feast of Saturnalia, the festival of the Unconquered Sun. Since ancient days, people throughout the northern hemisphere had celebrated at this time when the daylight hours had reached their shortest and again began to increase. Temples were decorated with greenery and candles, there were feasts and parades with special music, and gifts were given to family and friends. Among the British Druids, mistletoe was worshiped, and the Saxons used holly and ivy in their winter religious ceremonies. As Christianity spread throughout Europe, many of the pagan customs and festivities of the winter solstice were absorbed into the celebration of the birth of Jesus.

The English Puritans and Reformed Protestants across Europe determined to purify religious belief and remove everything that was not directly commanded or described in the Bible. They believed the observance of Christmas on December 25 was pagan, taken from the Roman Catholic calendar. In 1644 the Puritans banned Christmas observance in England, but the ban was quickly rescinded when King Charles II took the throne. In America, however, the Puritans of New England continued to treat December 25 as just another day in winter well into the 1800's. By the 1830's Puritanism was being thrown off in New England, and people in the cities were beginning to celebrate Christmas with a mix of Dutch and English tradi-

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

tions. By the end of the century, most Americans were celebrating a Christmas with all the traditions of today -- lighted and decorated trees, Christmas cards, carols, fruitcakes, festive parties, shopping, and giving gifts.⁸⁷

They also give a basic chronology, which is somewhat helpful in understanding the history of this holiday.

What Happened? A Chronology of Christmas

- 4th century - Emperor Constantine builds Church of Nativity in Bethlehem and declares Christ's birthday an official Roman holiday. The Bishop of Rome establishes December 25 as the day to celebrate Christ's birth. Nicholas of Myra in Lycia lives in Turkey. In Middle Ages his feast day is December 6, and he is known as a giver of gifts and the patron saint of children.
- 6th century - The church sets apart the four Sundays preceding Christmas for devotional preparation--Advent begins.
- 8th century - Boniface, English missionary to the Germans, replaces sacrifices to Oden's oak with a fir tree adorned in tribute to the Christ child.
- 11th century - The word "Christmas" first used in English.
- 13th century - Francis of Assisi ministers to the illiterate, common people by introducing a live nativity scene (crèche) into the church and festive carols in the language of the people.
- 17th century - First mention of Christmas tree in Germany, though some traditions say Martin Luther was the first to have lighted candles on a Christmas tree. English law under Puritans makes December 25 an official work day.
- 18th century - Handel's Messiah written in just 24 days.
- Mid-19th century - Modern Christmas begins to take shape. Clement Moore's A Visit from St. Nicholas popularizes Santa Claus; Prince Albert introduces the Christmas tree to England; Christmas

⁸⁷ Curtis, Ken. *Glimpses Bulletin Inserts*. #84. "Let's Celebrate Christmas, but When and How?"
<<http://chi.gospelcom.net/GLIMPSEF/Glimpses/glmps084.shtml>>.
Christian History Institute. 2004.

WHY DID WE SET THIS DATE?

cards become a tradition. Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol connects the spirit of warmth and good cheer with Christmas, and a Victorian sentimentalism becomes the Christmas Spirit.⁸⁸

Almost every Christian who has done any kind of background study in this subject would have little issue with either his overview or the chronology. For those who are unsure, however, here is another article from Christianity Today's *Christian History & Biography* "Why December 25th?" detailing the development of this holiday that most celebrate without a second thought.

... [F]or the first three centuries of Christianity, Christmas wasn't in December—or on the calendar anywhere Some church leaders even opposed the idea of a birth celebration. Origen (c.185-c.254) preached that it would be wrong to honor Christ in the same way Pharaoh and Herod were honored. Birthdays were for pagan gods.... Not all of Origen's contemporaries agreed that Christ's birthday shouldn't be celebrated, and some began to speculate on the date (actual records were apparently long lost) The eventual choice of December 25, made perhaps as early as 273, reflects a convergence of Origen's concern about pagan gods and the church's identification of God's son with the celestial sun. December 25 already hosted two other related festivals: *natalis solis invicti* (the Roman "birth of the unconquered sun"), and the birthday of Mithras, the Iranian "Sun of Righteousness" whose worship was popular with Roman soldiers. The winter solstice, another celebration of the sun, fell just a few days earlier. Seeing that pagans were already exalting deities with some parallels to the true deity, church leaders **decided to commandeer the date and introduce a new festival**. Western Christians first celebrated Christmas on December 25 in 336, **after Emperor Constantine had declared Christianity the empire's favored religion**. Eastern churches, however, held on to January 6 as the date for Christ's birth and his baptism....**The pagan origins of the Christmas date, as well as pagan origins for many Christmas customs (gift-giving and merrymaking from Roman Saturnalia; greenery, lights, and charity from the Roman New Year; Yule logs and various foods from Teutonic feasts), have always fueled arguments**

⁸⁸ Ibid.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

against the holiday.⁸⁹

The introduction of this “new festival” is said to have been a response to give Christians an alternative to the pagan holidays that occurred on these same days. The problem with this is that that they appear to have simply “baptised” these elements as Christian and herein the problem arises. In both cases, these articles come from the pro-Christmas perspective. After recounting all of these things, each of the articles still discuss the merits of celebrating the day.

⁸⁹ Coffman, Elesha. *Christian History & Biography* “Why December 25th?”
<<http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/newsletter/2000/dec08.html>>.
Christianity Today International/Christian History Magazine. 2000.

6

Chapter 6: Should We Keep December 25th as the Date?

It is widely acknowledged by Christian scholars that December 25th has its background in the worship of the sun. In his *defense* of Christmas, Chuck Missler discusses the December 25th date:

Mithra came to be identified with the sun-god Helios and became known as 'The Great God Helios-Mithras'. Several Roman emperors formally announced their alliance with the sun, including Commodus who was initiated in public. Emperor Aurelian (270 to 275 CE) blended a number of Pagan solstice celebrations of such god-men/saviors as Appolo, Attis, Baal, Dionysus, Helios, Hercules, Horus, Mithra, Osiris, Perseus, and Theseus into a single festival called the "Birthday of the Unconquered Sun", celebrated on December 25th.⁹⁰

My contention is that if we are to choose to celebrate His birth as an anniversary of sorts, we should at least try to approximate the time when He was born. As you will see, the 25th of December

⁹⁰ Missler, Chuck. *Focus on Jerusalem Library*. "The Roots of Christmas." December 28, 2005. <<http://focusonjerusalem.com/rootsofchristmas.html>>, 2005.

is among the least likely dates for His birth.

A Catholic Perspective

Recently, an article was brought to my attention by a fellow believer. This article ran on December 18, 2005 in the Calgary Herald. In it, a Catholic Deacon discusses the chronology of our Lord's birth in correlation with the keeping of December 25th. In essence, his line of reasoning went thusly:

Early Christians calculated Jesus of Nazareth's historic birth from Scripture, Doll claims. Dec. 25 is the date, given the timeline of his cousin John the Baptist. "In the time of Herod, King of Judea, there was a priest, Zechariah . . . and his wife Elizabeth, also of the line of Aaron," says Luke (1:10). Zechariah and Elizabeth were "upright and blameless," but sorrowfully, they had no children and were now "advanced in age." Then Zechariah "was chosen by lot, by the custom of the priesthood, to go into the Temple of the Lord and burn the incense," Luke continues. **Priests burned incense at the Holy of Holies on only one important day, Doll says: Yom Kippur or the Day of Atonement, 10 days after Rosh Hashana, the New Year. That year (4 BC, he argues) Rosh Hashana was Sept. 15.** ... Temple priests were celibate for their 10-day appointments, says Doll. So Zechariah is away from Elizabeth from Sept. 15 to Sept. 24. He then goes home, and John is conceived Sept. 25. The same Angel Gabriel later appears to young Mary of Nazareth, saying, "Hail, full of grace." He promises she will bear a Son "whose kingdom will never end." Mary asks, How? since she "does not know man." The angel replies "the Holy Spirit will come upon you . . ." As proof, Gabriel tells her, "Even Elizabeth your cousin is having a child in her old age; she who was barren is in her sixth month. For with God, nothing is impossible." Six months from John's conception, Sept. 25, is March 25, henceforth known as the Annunciation or conception of Jesus. From 500 AD until 1582 (and the new Gregorian calendar), it was also the Christian New Year. And: Nine months after Jesus' conception, March 25, is Dec. 25, his birth, Doll announces triumphantly. Why does Doll think John's conception was in 4 B.C., also the year Herod died? Jesus starts his public life at "about 30." That Passover, he argued with the priests of the temple. They remarked, "It has taken 46 years to build this temple" (John 2). Herod began his rebuilding of the temple in 19 BC. So Jesus and the priests argued in 28 AD. His crucifixion is in 30; and the

SHOULD WE KEEP THE 25TH AS THE DATE?

Romans destroy the Temple 40 years later. Admittedly, human gestation is 38 weeks, not simply nine months. And calculating Rosh Hashana [sic] for 4 BC could miss by a week or two. Still, even if the church was off by a week, Doll says, **it did its best to pinpoint a real event on the historical calendar, not merely replace one myth with another myth.**⁹¹

The Deacon makes a jump from what the text actually says to what he *thinks* it says. The text only says that Zechariah “was chosen by lot, by the custom of the priesthood, to go into the Temple of the Lord and burn the incense,” it doesn’t say he was chosen to burn incense in the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement – the term, Temple of the Lord, means exactly that; it doesn’t mean the Holy of Holies. Secondly, while he doesn’t actually say it, he gives the impression that somehow, the honour of burning incense by priests chosen by lots *only* happened *on* the Day of Atonement. Again, this intimation is incorrect.

In fact, incense was burnt twice a day *every* day in the temple. The text tells neither day nor month Zechariah was chosen by lots. It also neglects to mention that it was the Day of Atonement. The deacon in the article brings up a “nice” idea, but, sadly, it is based only on part truth. While there was a **possibility** it was done on the Day of Atonement, there is just as much a possibility that he was chosen for any of the other days allotted to the 8th division of Abijah (the tribe from whence Zechariah stems). Because the argument is based on a false premise, the subordinate arguments that follow are invalid.

If you read Exodus 30, you will find the text which outlines the original command given to Aaron. Later, the honour of burning incense fell to the casting of lots of those within the tribe of Levi. It happened only once in a person’s life, true, but it did not have to happen on the Day of Atonement.

⁹¹ Woodward, Joe. *Calgary Herald, Faith and Reason Section*. “Christmas on Dec. 25 linked to Scripture”. <<http://www.canada.com/calgaryherald/news/faithandreason/story.html?id=2a82558b-1b34-4eac-ab21-908217390859>> Published Sunday, December 18, 2005.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

Later, the act of casting lots for the daily sacrifice and the burning of incense was introduced. This act, known as the Tamid can be read about in the Mishnah. For those who would like to read more about this intriguing custom, please see “Appendix B” of this book.

General Scholarship

It is of note that most scholars would agree that Jesus was likely born in September/October of the year, rather than December.⁹²

It is also of note that Scripture mentions precious little by way of his birthday in an overt fashion; we can, however, glean a pretty clear approximation of at least the month of His birth from the Word and the customs of the day:⁹³

- ◆ Jesus began His ministry on or about His 30th birthday (Luke 3:23).

⁹² Some scholars do herald the spring as a possibility, as well, but generally speaking, almost none believe that the evidence points to December 25th. At best, the late December celebration may be able to point to the incarnation, but why not use a feast mentioned in the Bible to celebrate it (the Feast of Dedication) and another Biblical feast (Feast of Tabernacles) to commemorate His birth, if we feel we must. Dr. Henry Morris in his liner notes to Luke 2:8, 13 says this about the date of the traveling of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem:

A more probable time would be late September, the time of the annual Feast of Tabernacles, when such travel was commonly accepted. Thus, it is rather commonly believed (though not certain) that Jesus' birth was around the last of September....The probability is that this mighty angel, leading the heavenly host in their praises, was Michael the archangel; this occasion was later commemorated by the early church as Michaelmas ('Michael sent'), on September 29, the same as the date of the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles. It would have at least been appropriate for Christ to have been born on such a date, for it was at His birth that 'the Word was made flesh and dwelt (literally tabernacled) among us' (John 1:14). Dr. Henry M. Morris, *The Defender's Study Bible* (notes for Luke 2:8,13).

⁹³ For those who would like a look at detailed version of the reasoning for the dating of Jesus' birth in September/October, please take a look at the webpage <http://www.versebyverse.org/doctrine/birthofchrist.html>

SHOULD WE KEEP THE 25TH AS THE DATE?

- ❖ Jesus' ministry lasted 3 ½ years.⁹⁴
- ❖ He was murdered in March/April, on the Feast of Unleavened Bread/Day of Preparation
- ❖ If one counts back 6 months, one gets an approximation of September/October
- ◆ Sheep do not stay out in the pasture in December, as Israel gets cold and it often snows then, as it is winter season.
- ◆ Rome was not in the practice of calling for a census in the dead of winter; they generally did this while it was still relatively mild.
 - ❖ The census was done for taxation purposes; it makes more sense to call for taxes around harvest time compared to the dead of winter....
 - ❖ The great archaeologist, William Ramsay, says this about the idea of holding a census in the dead of winter:

But, when such a plan of tribal numbering was adopted, the time of year had to be carefully considered. In the first place the winter months had to be avoided, during which traveling was often, difficult, and in which unfavorable weather might cause great hardship and even prevent the plan from being carried out. As the day had to be fixed a long time beforehand, it must have been fixed in the season when good weather could be calculated on. In winter, weather might be good or it might be bad, and at the best it would be cold and trying.

That a day was fixed by the authorities, and that it was not left to the discretion of the people to go when they pleased (as in Egypt people seem to have been permitted to send in their enrollment papers at any time they pleased within the year), seems to follow from the fact that Joseph and Mary traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem at the very time when the birth of the child was approaching. Moreover, the advantages of the plan in ease and speed would have been sacrificed, unless a day had been fixed for the numbering.

Further, it was urgently necessary that the time which was fixed should not interfere with agricultural operations — that it should not come between the earliest

⁹⁴ Some would say 2 ½ years; however, most think 3½ in keeping with the chronology in Daniel 9, as well as the text shown in the Gospel accounts.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

date for the first harvest and the latest date for finishing the threshing, and getting in the grain and the fine cut straw from the threshing floors. The harvest varied considerably in different parts of the country, and reaping extended over about seven weeks, beginning from the middle of April.

Taking these circumstances into consideration, we may say with considerable confidence that August to October is the period within which the numbering would be fixed. It is no objection to this view that tradition places the birth of Jesus at Christmas. It is well known that the tradition is not early, that it varies in different periods and in different sections of the Church, and that the earliest belief was different.

Lewin, in *Fasti Sacri*, p. 115, selects 1st August as the day and month. Without laying any stress on the reasoning from the priestly periods by which he reaches this precise and exact conclusion, we must attach great weight to the argument which he founds on the fact that the shepherds were watching their flocks in the open country by night. In Asia Minor, at least, the pasturing of the flocks by night takes place only during the hot season and not in the winter. The sheep will not eat under the hot sun: they stand idly in a dense crowd in any place where the semblance of shade can be found during the day, and during the night they scatter and feed. In cold weather they seek food during the day.

On this characteristic of the sheep is founded the rule, said to be observed in Palestine, that the flocks were sent out after the Passover and brought in about October before the "former rain". Within that period, April to October, the day fixed for the numbering must fall; and during that period April to July was required for the reaping and garnering of the year's crop.⁹⁵

The assertion that Jesus was likely born during the September/October period has been made countless times by a host of Christian scholars.

⁹⁵ Ramsay, William. *Was Christ Born in Bethlehem?* Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, December 27, 2005 <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/ramsay/bethlehem.html>>, Updated November 6, 2005.

SHOULD WE KEEP THE 25TH AS THE DATE?

Scripture also bears this out more clearly than it does the December 25th date.⁹⁶

I would again ask **if** we are going to honour His birth, **why** we would choose a day that has nothing to do with the approximation of His birth.

Some cite evangelization as the reason for the keeping of this day.

Evangelism of the Masses

What about this seemingly notable cause? The argument that is laid out for this often sounds something like, “If we stop celebrating Christmas, we will offend the sensibilities of the non-believers and will cut off the bridge to salvation that has been made.”

In fact, many pastors and preachers today willingly admit that Pope Julius⁹⁷ added the celebration of Christmas on December 25th in order to 1) make recently converted Christians who had been persecuted by their pagan loved-ones feel more comfortable by allowing them to celebrate the feasts – without getting into the excesses of the paganism, such as sexual orgies and the like and 2) to help the church

⁹⁶ Here is a thought; why don't we celebrate His birth on a more likely date of His birth – say, the Feast of Tabernacles. If we **must** celebrate His birth, should we not at least try to base our customs on things that **God instituted** (and by the way, intends to keep in the millennium – see Zechariah 14) and on days that are more in line with the probable date?

It is of interest that swaddling clothes are associated with the Feast of Tabernacles, (or the Feast of Booths), as is His incarnation. In fact, in John 1:14, we are told that he dwelt among us – the Greek here is σκηνοῶ 1) *to fix one's tabernacle, have one's tabernacle, abide (or live) in a tabernacle (or tent), tabernacle* 2) *to dwell*, - in other words, to put on a temporary dwelling place. This festival is known as “the festival of Lights”; it was a time of the teaching of the word of God to the people of God. Makes sense that the Light of the World – the Word who is God would have come to the World during the Festival of Lights – a time when the Word was being preached.... This makes a lot more sense biblically than trying to fit non-biblical themes to our Lord.

⁹⁷ I believe under Constantine's considerable influence.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

maintain the “status quo”; they did not want to be “wanting” compared to the celebrations of the pagans; after all, the Roman leadership had only recently made Christianity the Official Religion of Rome.

The line of reasoning continues, “Everyone else is doing it, why not us? If we are all celebrating on the same day, it makes things simpler for the pagans to accept and join into that which the Church is doing. This is one of the many ways the Church builds bridges to the non-believers.”

The problem with this, is that we are not “building bridges” when we present the lies of Christmas alongside the Biblical account of His birth, but basing things on non-sanctioned, non-biblical tradition and fables, rather than truth. Essentially, ***we are building villages*** – finding something that resembles the truth and building on that foundation of sand.

The purpose of building a bridge is to take someone **from where they are into a new place** that offers freedom from the place they were at before. We don’t just “fix up” the place they are at to make it look kind of the same as the other side....

You will notice that while Paul utilised the information he knew about the pagan worshippers on Mars Hill, he did not then fuse all of the pagan implements of worship to their idols into real faith. He took them from where they were (the altar to the “unknown god”; one of the poet’s sayings about being God’s offspring) and brought them to where they needed to be

God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; For in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring.’ “Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the

SHOULD WE KEEP THE 25TH AS THE DATE?

Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, **but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained.** He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.⁹⁸

Note that he took a **statement**, “For we are also His offspring” and brought them to a greater understanding. He **did not** tell them that they were free to take their **elements of worship** and **integrate them into worship** with God. He actually talked to them about their ignorance and how they needed to repent of their idolatry, their art and **man’s devising**, since God cannot be worshiped that way. He also said that ignorance was not an excuse any longer.⁹⁹

We are not to worship the Lord in just any old way, “as long as we are trying to glorify the Lord”. The truth is, there are some forms of worship that God accepts and there are some forms that He hates. For a fuller explanation of this idea, please see the line of argument under “Who is God” in this book.

As we have already seen, God’s Church has a great deal of unbiblical

⁹⁸ Acts 17: 24 – 31

⁹⁹ “God overlooked humankind's sin, especially false worship. He "overlooked" it not by excusing it or failing to notice it, but rather **by not punishing it as it deserved** (Rom 3:25; Acts 14:16). Now, however, God commands all people everywhere to repent. Each generation's problem is that their ignorant worship is culpable, rebellious, false worship. God's solution is not to receive more information but to make a radical turn from idolatry to the one true God (Acts 14:15; 26:20). Formerly humankind lived in a sinful ignorance that God in his mercy passed over. Now, after sin has been judged in Jesus' death and resurrection, comes the "day of salvation" in a gospel proclaimed in his name, calling for repentance and promising forgiveness. Today there is no room in God's economy, as Paul preaches it, for so-called B.C. Christians--persons saved without knowledge of Christ and his saving work (contrast Kraft 1979:231).” – Bible Gateway. *IVP New Testament Commentary*, “Witness at Athens”. IntersVarsity Press. Gospel Communications International <<http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/index.php?action=getCommentaryText&cid=5&source=1&seq=i.51.17.3>>, 1995-2005.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

tradition to untangle from the truth when it comes to talking to people about Jesus – or even making sure our worship to God is biblical. As I have already mentioned, tradition in and of itself is not necessarily wrong; it becomes a problem, however, when we have to try to justify the keeping of the holiday, simply because we **may** have freedom to do so, even if it is in opposition to the plain reading of Scripture.

The Imminence of His Return

Some argue that the Church did not celebrate His birth for the first few hundred years because they felt He was going to “come back at any moment.” When He did not, people began to want to celebrate more of the important days of His life such as the Birth “until He finally returns.” This argument is one based only on conjecture; nowhere in the Bible does it mention that they did not celebrate His birth because He was going to come back soon.

If the truth be known, precious little is mentioned in the Word of God with respect to His birth at all; comparatively speaking, the Lord’s death, burial, and resurrection take up the lion’s share of the Scriptures in the New Testament. Paul, in discussing his primary focus, talks about the need to speak of nothing “among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”¹⁰⁰ Much of the New Testament is dedicated to the teaching of sound doctrine and the correction of wrong teaching; nevertheless, nowhere in the text are believers admonished to commemorate His birth from year to year.

This line of argument is based on tradition and silence; as I have mentioned before, while traditions of men are not *necessarily* inappropriate, when it comes to the behaviour and teaching/living out of our faith, our traditions need to be in subjection to the written word of God. **It** is the standard for our behaviour, not church fathers, pastors, ecclesial bodies, popes, professors, teachers, scholars, our parents, or even ourselves.

I must interject here that the desire to remember His birth is not necessarily wrong, per se; the thing is, though, one cannot utilize the argument of silence in Scripture regarding the yearly celebration of his

¹⁰⁰ I Corinthians 2:2

SHOULD WE KEEP THE 25TH AS THE DATE?

birth as a reason to do so.

7

Chapter 7: What About Other “Pagan” Stuff That Our Faith Has “Integrated”?

Recently in a sermon given, it was said that covenants, sacrifices, baptisms, and the crucifixion are things that were integrated into our faith from pagan origins. It was further said that if we were to have to give up the pagan elements of Christmas, if we were to be consistent we would then also have to give up covenants, sacrifices, baptisms, and the crucifixion of our Lord, since these elements that we hold dear to our hearts as Christians were once pagan.¹⁰¹ While I love the brother who gave the sermon and value his opinions and authority in many matters, I would respectfully disagree with his statement, based on some fundamental problems with his line of reasoning:

1. It presupposes that the pagan type of covenants, sacrifices, and baptisms of their gods **came first**. This is based on liberal theology, **not** on Scripture.
2. It ignores the obvious; covenants,¹⁰² sacrifices to God,¹⁰³ bap-

¹⁰¹ The author of this sermon wished not to be identified or associated with this book.

¹⁰² In Genesis 1-2, God covenants with Adam, although He does not call it such necessarily. When the terms of the covenant are breeched, Adam pays the price and God initiates a new covenant. Later in Genesis 6:18

WHAT ABOUT OTHER “PAGAN” STUFF THAT OUR FAITH HAS “INTEGRATED”?

tism¹⁰⁴ (the precursor of which were the ritual washings He commanded),¹⁰⁵ and the crucifixion of our Lord¹⁰⁶ were all *written* in scripture and they were *commanded* by God or *carried out* by God’s decretive will.

To try to say that the addition of Christmas alongside Holy worship is the same as the “integration” of these “pagan” elements, is to build a philosophical straw man and then knock it down. The premise is a false one, since it is insinuated that Covenants et cetera were things *man* introduced and then later integrated into the Word as common

God establishes a covenant with Noah; this is His pattern. The people did not initiate the covenant with God; God covenanted with them and they agreed. Hammurabi’s Code was not followed by the Israelites; it was the other way around. Hammurabi’s code certainly reflected the biblical practice, but it was not copied by believers.

¹⁰³ The first shedding of animal blood was, in fact, perpetrated by God Himself. In Genesis 3:21, after God dealt with the punishment to be given for the sin committed, you will notice that God made tunics of skin for Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:21). The leaves of fig were not enough, since without the shedding of blood, there can be no remission (Hebrews 9:22). Many scholars believe this was the first sacrifice recorded – a prototype of what Jesus eventually did for Adam and Eve – and us. With His sacrifice, He covered our nakedness. Even if all do not agree this was the first sacrifice, without doubt, the first recorded sacrifice to God by people was enacted by Abel (Genesis 4:4). This was pretty early on in the game; certainly before most of the pagan cults had a chance to grow.

“Then likewise he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry. And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.” – Hebrews 9:22-23

¹⁰⁴ See Matthew Chapter 3, especially verses 14-17.

¹⁰⁵ See Exodus 30:18; 40:30; Leviticus 13:46; Numbers Chapter 19.

¹⁰⁶ The Lord even chose the form of death – and wrote about it – at least 900 years before the fact in Psalm 22, as well as a host of other passages, including Isaiah 53. This is not the people choosing to adopt pagan custom – this is God choosing what is to be done.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

practice.

The opposite is true; **God** made covenants and instituted them with man; **He** was the One who said that the cost of sin was death; **He** was the One who instituted baptism. On the other hand, **to assume that we have the right to baptize pagan practices¹⁰⁷ as holy – without the “express written permission” of God is neither biblical nor appropriate**, as I will show through the rest of the book.

There have been other arguments made along the same vein; one of the most memorable for me was the keeping of time with the Julian or the Gregorian versus the Hebrew Calendar. The question of the calendar was posited to me by a Professor of mine regarding the idea of not mixing the pagan and the Holy. “What about the calendar,” she asked. “Should we not keep the Julian or the Gregorian Calendar? It is obviously from pagan sources.”

This question has taken me a while to work through; in essence, the question points back to this - are we mixing the secular things with things of God? If we are, then there is a problem. The fact is, the world keeps time in a way that God does not. In ancient Israel, there were even two different calendars in the Hebrew economy; one for the secular time keeping (harvest, et cetera) and one for the religious time keeping (the seven feasts). Both were based on the Hebrew calendar months, but the reckoning of time was a little different between the two.

Incidentally, the keeping of holy time *is* the central issue we are trying to deal with; do we have a right to change the days God has sanctioned as we please? Are we able to, for example, just choose to change Passover to Easter, or should we use the time-keeping sanctioned by God? Neither the Apostles nor the Christians in the First or Second Century chose to do away with the keeping of the time for Passover (“Easter”). It was not dispatched until much later, but more on that further on in the book....

¹⁰⁷ We are talking about things that were utilized in pagan worship and then later brought in as elements of worship to God. We are not talking about food, but things.

WHAT ABOUT OTHER “PAGAN” STUFF THAT OUR FAITH HAS “INTEGRATED”?

Ultimately, in issues of faith, practice, and behaviour, it is the Christian’s duty to follow what the Bible says, not what the cleverly planned devices of man say.¹⁰⁸

We Have Liberty in Christ

Another argument I have encountered goes like this: “In the New Testament economy, we have liberty because we are not under the Law, but under Grace.”¹⁰⁹ Then, they often add one of two, or even both, texts: “Besides, all things are lawful, even if all things are not profitable;”¹¹⁰ it also says that we have freedom to celebrate feasts and new moon festivals,¹¹¹ if we want, as long as we do it ‘as unto the Lord’.”¹¹²

It is important that we take a look at each of these passages in context, in order to determine what they do or do not actually bring to the argument.

Romans 6:14

The scripture excerpt, “we are not under the Law but under Grace” can be found in a larger context:

For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of

¹⁰⁸ Job 5:12, 13 - God is still in control.

¹⁰⁹ Romans 6:14

¹¹⁰ I Corinthians 10:23, paraphrase

¹¹¹ Romans 14:5-8

¹¹² I Corinthians 10:31

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, **you became slaves of righteousness.** I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so **now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.** For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now **having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**¹¹³

So, what determines sin? Is it not the revealed word of God in context, both Old and New Testaments? The word “sin” in the New Testament, ἁμαρτία, means to fall short of that which God has decreed; to miss the mark.¹¹⁴ Indeed, we all fall short at some point; however, this fact does not mean that we should willingly and actively participate in sin, simply because “we are not under the Law.” This passage tells us that if we choose to continue in habitual sin, we are presenting ourselves as slaves of sin, rather than slaves of righteousness.

Regarding the Law itself, Jesus told us:

“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Romans 6:14-23

¹¹⁴ Strong, James. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Online Bible. Vancouver, BC: Timnathserah Inc., 1995-2001.

¹¹⁵ Matthew 5:17 – 20

WHAT ABOUT OTHER “PAGAN” STUFF THAT OUR FAITH HAS “INTEGRATED”?

The Lord revealed that liberty must remain within the constructs and confines of His boundaries.... Here, and in the rest of the Matthew 5 passage, Jesus identified that the Spirit of the Law was much more difficult to fulfill than the letter of the Law.

Sometimes, Christians approach the entire Old Testament as if it has been completely replaced and rewritten by God. It has not been replaced, if the words of Jesus are to be believed. Portions of the Law have been *fulfilled* so that we might walk in freedom in Christ.¹¹⁶ However, when we are discussing whether or not we should celebrate Christmas, the part of the Word of God that deals with the essence of this subject matter is still very applicable, even in the 21st century.

I Corinthians 10:23

Remember the “All things are lawful” defense? Let’s look at the context. Is liberty license to change what HAS been written down? Paul, in speaking of the Christian’s freedom to eat meat sacrificed to idols says this:

Observe Israel after the flesh: *Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?* What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? Rather, that *the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He? All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify.* Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being.¹¹⁷

Ironically, a portion of the text found here, as I have already mentioned, is one that is used by proponents of Christmas. It is of interest

¹¹⁶ What that *really* means is that in Christ, we *are keeping* the Law. He is not a Lawbreaker and would *never* tell His followers to break His commands.

¹¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 10:18 – 24

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

that Paul's main focus of this saying is the exact opposite of the intent used by these Christians. His point was that while we may have freedom to, for example, eat meat to idols since they are nothing but demons, we **risk provocation of the Lord to jealousy**. Paul then asks the rhetorical question about whether we are stronger than God is. (Obviously, the answer is "no"). I don't know about you, but my God is holy and asks us to remain separate from detestable things, even if we *might* have freedom....

After this, he does go on to discuss the liberty of the Christian with respect to other Christians (i.e. you have freedom to eat the meat if you do not know where it comes from, but shouldn't if someone lets you know it is from an idol and/or if you know someone among you finds that detestable – see also the last paragraph found in the Section on Romans 14).

We must also bring in the Acts 15:28-29 passage if we are going to discuss this issue, as Acts 15 chronicles the first council ever convened in the church. Since scripture cannot contradict scripture and since Acts 15 tells us that the Holy Spirit thought it was appropriate not to eat meats sacrificed to idols, taken with this passage, it is safe to assume that a believer is not supposed to *knowingly* eat meat that has been sacrificed to idols. Why? Because again, if we know for sure the meat was sacrificed to an idol and we still eat it, we are offending God and possibly causing others to stumble. Paul in no wise disagrees with the Spirit. The problem is we often take passages by themselves without taking in the whole counsel of God.

Finally, before we leave the discussion of meat sacrificed to idols, we need to read what Jesus has to say on this issue *post resurrection*. In the book of Revelation, Jesus, in speaking with two of the churches (Pergamos and Thyatira), tells them that He is against them in their practice of eating meat sacrificed to idols.

But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, **to eat things sacrificed to idols**, and to commit sexual immorality.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Revelation 2:14

WHAT ABOUT OTHER “PAGAN” STUFF THAT OUR FAITH HAS “INTEGRATED”?

Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and ***eat things sacrificed to idols***.¹¹⁹

Clearly, the Creator of the Universe and the Saviour of our souls found this sin to be so grievous He mentioned it in His final “official” communication to His people through His evangelist, John. From His words, it would certainly show that Jesus regards this as something we are not to do, even though we might have “liberty in Christ”.

Given these last passages, there can be no doubt that while Paul may have said “all things are lawful” he was not teaching that one could go ahead and just ignore the teachings already set forth in the Old Testament regarding eating meat you know has been sacrificed to idols.

In other words, it is one thing to go about our daily business and do the things that we have set out, but it is another thing entirely when we find out that a food (or practice) has been banned by God because it has been polluted with the worship of idols, yet we continue to partake in it.

Romans 14

As we have already found, there is no single consensus about the original date of the Messiah’s birth. We have established that the best scholarship indicates a September/October date, however.

Many would say that the date itself doesn’t really matter and that we as believers are free to set aside any day we choose to worship Him. Consistently, the passage in Romans 14 is brought up as a “proof” text that this behaviour is completely allowed.

There are some concerns with this reading of Scripture. One of the basic principles one learns in the art of hermeneutics (that is, how one is to interpret Scripture), is that an interpretation of a text **cannot** be in opposition with that which has already been revealed.

¹¹⁹ Revelation 2:20

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

This Romans 14 passage is the one most often cited as proof of freedom to celebrate Christmas. The problem with utilizing it to approve of any celebration one wants “as long as it glorifies God”, is that it leaves too much latitude. What constitutes “glorifying the Lord”? Are there not some biblical issues that are injured in the application of this text to the situation of Christmas, as it stands, anyway, since many of the practices we have adopted into the holiday expressly contradict the Deuteronomy 12 passage cited at the beginning of this book? It also goes against the principles found in many others in the New Testament, not the least of which is this one:

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. **For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols?** For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said:

"I will dwell in them
And walk among them.
I will be their God,
And they shall be My people."

Therefore
**"Come out from among them
And be separate, says the Lord.
Do not touch what is unclean,
And I will receive you."
"I will be a Father to you,
And you shall be My sons and daughters,
Says the LORD Almighty."**¹²⁰

If Jesus is God,¹²¹ if the Commandments are good, and if Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commandments",¹²² why do we think we are free to just ignore that which was written to the Israelites in Deuteron-

¹²⁰ II Corinthians 6:14-18

¹²¹ ... and Scripture would say that He is.

¹²² John 14:15

WHAT ABOUT OTHER “PAGAN” STUFF THAT OUR FAITH HAS “INTEGRATED”?

omy about right worship?

Is God still the same¹²³ or has He changed His mind about these things?

Listen again to the command that God made to the Israelites regarding integration of non-biblical worship of other idols with their worship:

"When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.' *"You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. **Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.**"*¹²⁴

Another rule of hermeneutics tells us that Scripture should give further light to Scripture. In dealing with the feasts, Paul speaks to the Church at Colosse:

So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, **which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.**¹²⁵

Clearly then, the issue here is **not about pagan feasts integrated into our worship; if this were the case, then it would logically follow that all pagan practices are a shadow of Christ and NOT an abomination to the Lord.** This line of reasoning is bereft of the truth.

¹²³ **Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.** Hebrews 13:8; Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, **with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.** - James 1:17

¹²⁴ Deuteronomy - 12:29-32

¹²⁵ Colossians 2:16, 17

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

In the context of the text itself as well as that in Colossians, the issue was about the keeping of the Feasts; many Jewish Christians kept the feasts and the non-Jewish believers did not necessarily keep the days. To maintain unity within the Body of Christ, Paul discussed how one was free to keep these new moons and festivals – or not.

Incidentally, even if one takes on the more contemporary reading of this passage to include the celebration of festivals of our own making to the glory of the Lord, nowhere in scripture are we given permission to “sanctify” pagan practices as our own. We can perhaps set aside any day we would like, but the behaviours, conduct and elements of these days that we set aside should not include pagan elements of worship to other gods.

Keeping Holy Time

I have heard it said many times that the Church devised Christmas (as well as Advent, Ash Wednesday, and a host of other days) in order to help the church “keep holy time”; in other words, to help the people who follow Christ have Him in every aspect of their daily lives. This integration of an ecclesial calendar, they say,¹²⁶ illustrates the life of Christ to people every year. As such, the keeping of these days is very helpful for the spiritual formation of the believer.

While I would agree that the keeping of holy time *does* help with the spiritual formation of the believer, if we do choose to keep holy time, why would we not *just choose to keep the Biblical feasts as outlined in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New Testament?* It seems to me that if *anyone* knows about the keeping of Holy time, it is the Holy God of Israel who *fulfilled* all of these days He set forth in the Old Testament.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ “They” include many of my professors at Bible College and Seminary, as well as countless leaders within the New Testament Church.

¹²⁷ There are many books out on the subject; 1 of the more comprehensive and easily understood books is called, “The 7 Festivals of the Messiah” by Edward Chumney. You can read portions of his book online: <http://www.hebroots.com/hebrew_root.html#SevenFestivalsBook>

WHAT ABOUT OTHER “PAGAN” STUFF THAT OUR FAITH HAS “INTEGRATED”?

Paul Kept Holy Time

It is of note, by the way, that scripture gives a strong indication that Paul chose to celebrate at least some (and probably all) of the feasts.

When they asked him [Paul] to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent, but took leave of them, saying, "I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing." And he sailed from Ephesus. And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up and greeted the church, he went down to Antioch.¹²⁸

Paul also utilizes the word pictures of the Feasts throughout his epistles in the New Testament. If one is to take his word as it stands, it would appear that Paul believed that the Feasts themselves were given to remind the people of God, what God had done for them, and how these Feasts had been fulfilled by the coming of Christ and the giving of the Holy Spirit. As such, the word pictures were/are instructive to teach the original intent of God, as laid out in the Old Testament and as fulfilled through the life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension of our Lord.¹²⁹

Despite the contents of the letters written to the Roman and Colossian Churches, with respect to New Moons and Festivals and Sabbaths, there is no doubt that the entire church *did* keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of the Passover, and Feast of Firstfruits, and likely the Feast of Pentecost in accordance with the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of our Lord and the giving of the Holy Spirit.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Acts 18:20 – 22

¹²⁹ Incidentally, this view of the Feasts is more in keeping with Scripture than that of our created “holy days”, since Jesus said He was to fulfil the Law and the Prophets in Matthew 5:7-8.

¹³⁰ As such, based on this, the fact that Paul himself kept the feasts, and the fact that Jesus commanded us to keep the Feast of Passover, it can safely be assumed that the issue in Romans 14 was about some pressuring the Gentiles that they HAD to keep all 7 of the Biblical feasts, in order to be considered Christian.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

You will also notice in I Corinthians 5, when Paul addresses the decidedly Gentile Church, he discusses the (very Hebrew, Old Testament) idea of leaven (yeast):

Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. **Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.**¹³¹

The conclusion: while we have freedom to choose not to celebrate some of the Biblical Feasts; we do not have the freedom to *add* other feasts.

¹³¹ I Corinthians 5:6-8



Chapter 8: The Roman Influence on Christendom

This idea is not so different than that of the people who were in leadership at the time of the acceptance of this “new feast”. While the church in the fourth century was certainly aware of the pagan origins, they did not discard them; rather, they claimed them as Christian and integrated them into the newly tooled festival that would eventually be given the name, “Christmas”.

In the fourth century, however, the principal viewpoint within the pecking order of the Roman Catholic Church was that of the Roman world; command and conquer. It was common for the Romans to do two things when they took over another country; they would try to bring the people from the conquered area to a “place” where they would conform with Roman/Greek culture¹³² and they would often incorporate whatever symbols et cetera that the country had. In essence, when you won, you did not only take the land, but took over all of the symbols of the country as your own; to utilise these symbols in your own art or culture was to show

¹³² Distinctives of a culture were permitted to remain as long as the basic Roman mindset was also agreed upon (i.e. one could worship whatever god they wanted, as long as they paid homage to Caesar, as well, when it was required).

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

the world that you had defeated it.

From the perspective of the Roman/Greek world view, Christendom “had a right” to conquer and take over things that had formerly been pagan. By the mid 300’s, the idea that Christendom had a right to alter days and methods of celebration, as well as even names of celebrations became evident.

In his attempt to unify the world of Christendom with respect to the time of the celebration of the Passover, Constantine had this to say during the Council of Nicea in 325:¹³³

“At this meeting the question concerning the most holy day of Easter was discussed, and it was resolved by the united judgment of all present, that this **feast ought to be kept by all and in every place on one and the same day.** For what can be more becoming or honorable to us than that this feast from which we date our hopes of immortality, **should be observed unfaillingly by all alike, according to one ascertained order and arrangement?** And first of all, **it appeared an unworthy thing that in the celebration of this most holy feast we should follow the practice of the Jews, who have impiously defiled their hands with enormous sin,** and are, therefore, deservedly afflicted with blindness of soul. **For we have it in our power, if we abandon their custom, to prolong the due observance of this ordinance to future ages, by a truer order, which we have preserved from the very day of the passion until the present time.** Let us then have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd; for we have received from our Saviour a different way....”¹³⁴

While this text does not deal with Christmas specifically, it does illustrate

¹³³ The Council approved the changing of the day from Passover to Easter unanimously.

¹³⁴ Eusebius of Caesarea. 1996. Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, Series II, Volume I. “Ecclesiastical History”. Trans. Richardson, Ernest Cushing. PhD. Sage Digital Library. Oregon; SAGE Software. (See also) Medieval Sourcebook. *Paul Halsell*. “Eusebius of Caesarea: The Life of the Blessed Emperor Constantine.” <<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/vita-constantine.html>> May 1997.

THE ROMAN INFLUENCE ON CHRISTENDOM

my point. Undoubtedly, it was not considered by Constantine and those in the Council to be inappropriate to disregard that which came before and to “make something new” in the name of the Lord. Based **only** on the presuppositions held by the Romans in the fourth century, this perspective does hold some credence.

In keeping with People of the Book, though, we must look at all of this not from the perspective of traditions and backgrounds, but from the perspective of Scripture. Moreover, in keeping with People of the Book, if the viewpoint that we have held does not line up that of the Bible, we **must** choose the biblical point of view over our ideologies, no matter how uncomfortable it might be for us.

In theory, at least, Evangelicals hold to this standard. In the church I have attended, the leadership of the denomination says this about the position of the Bible in our lives:

We believe the Holy Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, as originally given by God are divinely inspired, without error, entirely trustworthy, and constitute the only supreme authority **in all matters of faith, teaching and behaviour.** II Peter 1:21
Mark 12:26-36 II Timothy 3:16-17 Acts 1:16 Hebrews 4:12.¹³⁵

Nevertheless, our church, like most in North America, holds to many of the traditions and customs of the Roman Catholic Church, especially in the matter of keeping “holy” time. Even in our little church, the one that is under the banner that would say the Bible is divinely inspired, without error, trustworthy and the supreme authority, it chooses the Roman Catholic Ecclesial Calendar in favour of the Biblical accounting of holy days in the light of Jesus’ amazing fulfillment of them.

As an aside, five years after Constantine proclaimed the “need” to change the day of Passover to a day that all could celebrate at the same time (which just happened to correspond with the Pagan spring fertility ritual), Constantine dedicated Constantinople. When he did so, however, he did not do so using only the God of the Bible; according to the *Catholic En-*

¹³⁵ Associated Gospel Churches. “Articles of Faith and Doctrine”. Burlington, ON.

<http://www.agcofcanada.com/index.php?option=com_docman&catid=26&Itemid=57&task=docclick&bid=10&limitstart=0&limit=5>, June, 2004.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

cyclopedia, he dedicated it in true syncretistic fashion:

In the dedication of Constantinople in 330 a ceremonial half pagan, half Christian was used. The chariot of the sun-god was set in the market-place, and over its head was placed the Cross of Christ, while the Kyrie Eleison was sung. Shortly before his death Constantine confirmed the privileges of the priests of the ancient gods. Many other actions of his have also the appearance of half-measures, as if he himself had wavered and had always held in reality to some form of syncretistic religion. Thus he commanded the heathen troops to make use of a prayer in which any monotheist could join, and which ran thus: "We acknowledge thee alone as god and king, we call upon thee as our helper. From thee have we received the victory, by thee have we overcome the foe. To thee we owe that good which we have received up to now, from thee do we hope for it in the future. To thee we offer our entreaties and implore thee that thou wilt preserve to us our emperor Constantine and his god-fearing sons for many years uninjured and victorious."¹³⁶

This is just one example of the very syncretistic practices that were common in the fourth century. We know that Constantine had more than a little influence on the Church polity of the day.¹³⁷

Saturnalia and Mithraism: A Part of the Legacy

I have already alluded to these particular celebrations earlier in the book. Undoubtedly, it has been around for a while. Some scholars say that the feast of Saturnalia did not actually start until Aurelius gave an edict in or around 279 AD, shortly before the Christians began to try to supplant the pagan celebration. However, there is evidence that it certainly predates that time. In a letter to Gallus, Pliny the Younger (62-113 AD) mentions,

When I betake myself into this sitting-room, I seem to be quite away even from my villa, and I find it delightful to sit there, especially during the Saturnalia, when all the rest of the house rings

¹³⁶ Herbermann, Charles G. & Georg Grupp. *The Catholic Encyclopedia Volume IV*. "Constantine". Ed. Robert Appleton Company, 1908. Online: <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04295c.htm>> Ed. K. Knight, 2003.

¹³⁷ Not only in his day, but some of his policies even touch us today, such as the policy of the church having tax-free status.

THE ROMAN INFLUENCE ON CHRISTENDOM

with the merry riot and shouts of the festival-makers; for then I do not interfere with their amusements, and they do not distract me from my studies.¹³⁸

Whether Christians are comfortable with the idea or not, the celebration of Saturnalia is a main contender for the many varied customs Christendom adopted during the feast of Christmas.

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* tells us about this pre-Christian celebration:

Natalis Invicti. The well-known solar feast, however, of Natalis Invicti, celebrated on 25 December, has a strong claim on the responsibility for our December date. For the history of the solar cult, its position in the Roman Empire, and syncretism with Mithraism, see Cumont's epoch-making "Textes et Monuments" etc., I, ii, 4, 6, p. 355. Mommsen (*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, 12, p. 338) has collected the evidence for the feast, which reached its climax of popularity under Aurelian in 274. Filippo del Torre in 1700 first saw its importance; it is marked, as has been said, without addition in Philocalus' Calendar. It would be impossible here even to outline the history of solar symbolism and language as applied to God, the Messiah, and Christ in Jewish or Christian canonical, patristic, or devotional works. Hymns and Christmas offices abound in instances; the texts are well arranged by Cumont (op. cit., addit. Note C, p. 355).¹³⁹

Alongside Saturnalia, was the celebration of the birth of Mithras:

In addition, members of the upper classes often celebrated the birthday of Mithra, the god of the unconquerable sun, on December 25. It was believed that Mithra, an infant god, was born of a rock. For some Romans, Mithra's birthday was the most

¹³⁸ Pliny the Younger. *The Letters of Pliny the Younger. Book 2. First Series. "Letter to Gallus"*. The Walter Scott Publishing Co., Ltd. N.D. Online Version: [AncientHistory.About.com](http://ancienthistory.about.com/library/bl/bl_text_plinyltrs2.htm). New York Times Company, 2005. December 26, 2005. <http://ancienthistory.about.com/library/bl/bl_text_plinyltrs2.htm>.

¹³⁹ Martindale, Cyril. *The Catholic Encyclopedia Volume III. "Christmas"*. Ed. Robert Appleton Company, 1908. Online: <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03724b.htm>> Ed. K. Knight, 2003.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

sacred day of the year.¹⁴⁰

While quite different in person and mission, there are a few similarities between the legends of Mithra and the story of Christ. Mithra was said to have been born in a cave, with shepherds attending, (although there were no men on earth at the time (?)). Other legends have him being born from a rock by a river under a tree. According to Persian mythology, Mithra was born of a virgin given the title 'Mother of God'. Mithra was a moral god, upholding the sanctity of the contract even when the contract was made with one who was sure to break it. Initiates into Mithraism would be 'baptized' with the trickle of the sacrificial bull's blood that would flow into a pit. This blood was said to cleanse the initiates from any impurities. Tertullian (160-220 A.D.), the early Church writer, noticed that the pagan religion utilized baptism as well as bread and wine consecrated by priests. He considered Mithraism to have been inspired by the devil, who wanted to mock Christians and lead others to hell.¹⁴¹

It must be mentioned that Scripture promised the Messiah many years before Mithras' legend ever came on the scene. His payment for sins was promised from the book of Genesis, foreshadowed in the Passover of Exodus, and illustrated throughout the Old Testament. Even the method of Jesus' death was alluded to in Psalm 22, as was the Bread of Life and the Baptism, not to mention sacrifice itself.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ History Channel. "Christmas". January 12, 2006. <<http://www.historychannel.com/exhibits/holidays/christmas/real2.html>>, January 28, 2003.

¹⁴¹ Missler, Chuck. "The History of Christmas." Thursday, January 12, 2006. <http://www.khouse.org/enews_article/2003/679/> Koinonia House, 2006.

The eminent Dr. Missler goes on to say that just because these things had a hand in the formation of Christmas doesn't mean we should not celebrate it. He also mentions that even amid the revelry of Christmas, the story of Christ's birth comes through. For a response to this line of reasoning, please see the section, *Just Because God Can Use Something Doesn't Mean We Should Do It*.

¹⁴² Please see the section on *What About Other "Pagan" Stuff That Our Faith Has "Integrated"?*

THE ROMAN INFLUENCE ON CHRISTENDOM

In the feast of Christmas, though, the Ecclesial authorities saw an opportunity to supplant the customs and beliefs of the people with a Christian interpretation.

Has the Church Replaced Israel?

It is from Roman/Hellenistic philosophy that the Church felt they had the authority to replace that which has already been set. This was based on the theology that would say the Church replaced all of Israel as the Chosen people and that Israel was no longer chosen.¹⁴³ This does not bear out; neither does the idea that Israel and the Church have an entirely divergent future, with respect to salvation. Salvation has *always* come from God through the Messiah by faith, even in the Old Testament. Righteousness was accounted to those who believed in the coming Messiah and followed the Lord *by* faith before Jesus' incarnation. In essence, they too were believers. As Gentile believers in the Messiah, we were grafted *into* Israel, not the other way around. (I have done a study on this in response to a related theology put forth by an end-time theologian. Should you desire to read this text, it can be found at the end of this book in "Appendix A.")

However, the concern that I (and many Christians before me) have had, comes not from the "freedom" the Christian church is supposed to have, but from the perspective that the Bible is to be our ultimate authority on such matters.

I am not saying that we cannot do anything if it is not expressly spoken of in Scripture, since then we would not be allowed to go to the mall or drive a car or even go to the zoo. However, the Bible, while it may not deal with every imaginable situation explicitly, it certainly speaks of basic principles that can be applied, not only to the situations found in Biblical times, but also to situations that we Christians find ourselves in now in the 21st century.

For example, while the Bible does not expressly mention the idea of cyber-sex, there are clear, basic suppositions within the Bible itself that demarcate the boundaries we as believers are to keep regarding our sexu-

¹⁴³ The technical term for this is "Replacement Theology" or "Reconstructionism".

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

ality. Regardless of the “new” venue, there is really *nothing* new under the sun.

9

Chapter 9: Elements of Christmas

Greenery to Decorate the Home

The history of the use of greenery in the home predates the Christian custom by millennia. Ancient people used to hang all sorts of ever-green boughs in their doorways and windows to keep away all manner of evil, real or imagined, including evil spirits, ghosts, witches, and even illnesses.

Near the time of the winter solstice (December 21 or 22), many of the ancient people, who believed the sun was a god, thought that the sun was becoming sick and weak. These people celebrated the solstice because they believed it meant that the sun was getting well again. According to the History Channel, “Evergreen boughs reminded them of all the green plants that would grow again when the sun god was strong and summer would return.” Likewise, the Egyptians, who worshipped Ra, also put green palm rushes in their homes at the solstice. To them, these rushes symbolized “the triumph of life over death.”¹⁴⁴

In the Saturnalian feast, the god of agriculture, Saturn, was honoured

¹⁴⁴ History Channel. “Christmas Trees”. December 24, 2005. <<http://www.historychannel.com/exhibits/holidays/christmas/trees.html>>, 2005.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

by the Romans when they “decorated their homes and temples with evergreen boughs.” They did this in anticipation of the spring; the evergreens were a reminder of the greenery that would soon cover the land again. Druids also chose to decorate their temples with evergreens; for them, this was a symbol of everlasting life. For the Vikings, the evergreens were considered to be a special plant to their god, Balder.¹⁴⁵

Holly and Ivy

Holly and Ivy seem to be integral parts of the traditional Christmas celebration. There is even a Christmas Carol that talks about its apparent significance with respect to the celebration of the Lord’s birth (not surprisingly called “Holly and Ivy”). How and why, though, did this plant become associated with a celebration for the Birth of Jesus?

On the website, Tartans.com, the history of holly is explained:

In addition to being associated with the Sun God (Saturn) in ancient Rome, holly was important in Pagan/Druidic religion and customs. Under many Pagan religions, it was customary to place holly leaves and branches around their dwellings during winter. This was intended as a kindly and hospitable gesture; they believed that the tiny fairies which inhabited the forests could come into their homes and use the holly as shelter against the cold.... To the Druids, it was holly’s evergreen nature that made it special. They believed that it remained green to help keep the earth beautiful when the deciduous trees (such as the oak, which they also held sacred) shed their leaves. It was also their custom to wear it in their hair when they ventured into the forests to watch the priests collecting mistletoe. The holly berries were thought to represent the sacred menstrual blood of their Goddess. In addition to these uses, some ancient religions used holly for protection. They would decorate doors and windows with it in the hopes that it would capture (or at least dissuade) any evil spirits before they could enter the house. In effect, it was used as flypaper for demons. As the British Isles began to convert to Christianity, **the early Christians adopted the tradition of decorating their home with holly. At first they displayed it to avoid persecution, but as Christianity began to gain dominance they started to incorporate**

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

ELEMENTS OF CHRISTMAS

it into their own religion. The significance of the berries changed so that they now symbolized the blood of Christ and holly gradually solidified its position as a Christmas tradition. So as you're hanging that wreath (with a sprig of holly on it, of course) on your door, or placing it around the house this Christmas, think a little about the roots of this tradition. In addition to honouring your Celtic heritage and making your home look nice, you may also be performing the invaluable service of providing shelter to tree fairies and protecting your home from malevolent spirits.¹⁴⁶

This website is by no means unique; thousands of sites, encyclopaedias, and glossaries recount the non-biblical history of holly and the integration of this plant into the tradition of Christians.

Ivy was known as the feminine half of the holly, according to many of the pagan religions. In the book, *Christmas Carols Ancient and Modern*, author William Sandys discusses the likely origin of the fascination Christians had with these interesting plants in his conversation about the carol, The Holly and the Ivy:

The verses of this charming English carol date back centuries. They were first officially published in 1861 by a Joshua Sylvester, who admitted that he had obtained them from "an old broadside, printed a century and a half since." The symbolism in them probably pre-dates Christianity and was simply modified to serve it. Hence, the white blossoms became the purity of Mary; the red berries, Jesus' blood; the thorns, His crown; the bitter bark, His crucifixion agony. The symbolism of the ivy has been lost, although some suggest that the holly stands for the masculine elements of Jesus' birth, and the clinging ivy for the feminine elements.¹⁴⁷

Mistletoe

As with the holly and ivy, there is a very long history associated with this plant. While many today see it as nothing more than a harmless tradition that encourages friendly fraternizing between the sexes, this plant was very closely associated with the oak tree and the worship of

¹⁴⁶ <http://www.tartans.com/articles/holly.html>

¹⁴⁷ Simon, William L., ed., *The Reader's Digest Merry Christmas Songbook*. Pleasantville, NY: Readers Digest Association, 2003.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

it by the druids. Pliny the Elder (23-79 AD) discusses the long-held tradition of the Druids with respect to this plant.

The Druids--for that is the name they give to their magicians -- held nothing more sacred than the mistletoe and the tree that bears it, supposing always that tree to be the robur [oak].... In fact, it is the notion with them that everything that grows on it [the oak] has been sent immediately from heaven, and that the mistletoe upon it is a proof that the tree has been selected by god himself as an object of his especial favour.... Having made all due preparation for the sacrifice and a banquet beneath the trees, they bring thither two white bulls, the horns of which are bound then for the first time. Clad in a white robe the priest ascends the tree, and cuts the mistletoe with a golden sickle, which is received by others in a white cloak. They then immolate the victims, offering up their prayers that god will render this gift of his propitious to those to whom he has so granted it. It is the belief with them that the mistletoe, taken in drink, will impart fecundity to all animals that are barren, and that it is an antidote for all poisons. Such are the religious feelings which we find entertained towards trifling objects among nearly all nations.¹⁴⁸

The history of mistletoe is varied. According to a number of sources, much of the greenery of paganism was integrated into Christianity after many of the European peoples were converted to Catholic "Christianity". During the campaign to convert many of the people in Britain, the Pope at the time, Gregory, sent a letter to the Abbot Mellitus discussing the matter. In the letter, he indicated that it was all right for the people to keep their places of worship, but that they would be rededicated to God. Further, they were permitted to continue to sacrifice cattle, but do so to God, rather than their idols. Pope Gregory even allowed the maintenance of the utilisation of the boughs of ever-

¹⁴⁸ Pliny the Elder. The Natural History. Book XVI. The Natural History of the Forest Trees. Chapter 95 "Historical Facts Connected With the Mistletoe". John Bostock, M.D., F.R.S. H.T. Riley, Esq., B.A. London. Taylor and Francis, Red Lion Court, Fleet Street. 1855. Online Version: Perseus Digital Library Project. Ed. Gregory R. Crane. September 20, 2005. Tufts University. December 26, 2005. <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?lookup=Plin.+Nat.+17.95>>

ELEMENTS OF CHRISTMAS

green they were used to using to honour God (and the Catholic saints, of course).

And because they are used to slaughter many oxen in sacrifice to devils, some solemnity must be given them in exchange for this, as that on the day of the dedication, or the nativities of the holy martyrs, whose relics are there deposited, they should build themselves huts of the boughs of trees about those churches which have been turned to that use from being temples, and celebrate the solemnity with religious feasting, and no more offer animals to the Devil, but kill cattle and glorify God in their feast, and return thanks to the Giver of all things for their abundance; to the end that, whilst some outward gratifications are retained, they may the more easily consent to the inward joys. For there is no doubt that it is impossible to cut off every thing at once from their rude natures; because he who endeavours to ascend to the highest place rises by degrees or steps, and not by leaps. **Thus the Lord made Himself known to the people of Israel in Egypt; and yet He allowed them the use, in His own worship, of the sacrifices which they were wont to offer to the Devil, commanding them in His sacrifice to kill animals, to the end that, with changed hearts, they might lay aside one part of the sacrifice, whilst they retained another; and although the animals were the same as those which they were wont to offer, they should offer them to the true God, and not to idols; and thus they would no longer be the same sacrifices.**¹⁴⁹

This Pope, taking his queues, undoubtedly from the Popes and leaders who preceded him, decided that it would be perfectly appropriate to allow these people to retain the behaviours of their old religion, while giving them new names and trying to overlay them with new significance.

¹⁴⁹ *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of England: A Revised Translation*. Chapter XXX. "A copy of the letter which Pope Gregory sent to the Abbot Mellitus, then going into Britain. [601 A.D.]" George Bell and Sons, London. 1907. Online version: Christian Classics Ethereal Library. *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of England: A Revised Translation*. Chapter XXX. "A copy of the letter which Pope Gregory sent to the Abbot Mellitus, then going into Britain". December 26, 2005. <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bede/history.v.i.xxix.html>>, 2005.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

Pope Gregory's rationalisation for this is that God allowed the Israelites to continue to sacrifice and that God just changed things to get them to sacrifice to Him is ludicrous!

Compare his rationalisation with this passage discussing this *allegedly* cleaned-up "pagan" sacrifice:

Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, and said, "Go, sacrifice to your God in the land." And Moses said, "*It is not right to do so, for we would be sacrificing the **abomination of the Egyptians** to the LORD our God. If we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, then will they not stone us? We will go three days' journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the LORD our God as He will command us.*"¹⁵⁰

Clearly, when Pharaoh tried to get Moses and Aaron to just stay in the land of Egypt to sacrifice, Moses replied to Pharaoh that if he did try to sacrifice there, he would be sacrificing "the abomination of the Egyptians to the LORD" and if they were to do so, the Israelites would end up stoning them. That certainly does not sound like there was going to be a compromise to the Holy One of Israel.

To reiterate, God, in the book of Genesis, instituted sacrifice when He Himself killed the first animals to cover Adam and Eve. We also know that Abel was already sacrificing animals to the Lord, as a firstfruit from his flock to the Lord.¹⁵¹ As such, the act of sacrificing animals was ***first an ordinance of God*** and was later adopted/polluted by pagans. It is because of this that I completely disagree with the logic of the Pope, with respect to the keeping of these sacrifices.¹⁵²

His logic is no reason to allow the pagans to retain their practices with a thin veneer of Christianity on the surface.... With such permission

¹⁵⁰ Exodus 8:25-27

¹⁵¹ Genesis 4:4

¹⁵² For a more thorough treatment of this issue, please see the section, *What About Other "Pagan" Stuff That Our Faith Has "Integrated"*.

ELEMENTS OF CHRISTMAS

given by the Pope himself, it logically follows that the leaders of the Church in Britain would have had no problem integrating holly, ivy, or anything else that was formerly pagan.

In a book on Christmas hymns, one can read some of the history of this element:

The mistletoe, which forms an essential and prominent object in these [Christmas] decorations, was looked upon by our Pagan ancestors with a species of veneration; it is supposed to have been the sacred branch referred to by Virgil, in his description of the descent to the lower regions; and if so, may be presumed to have been in use in the religious ceremonies of the Greeks and Romans, as this description is considered an allegorical representation of some of their mysteries. It is well known that this plant was held sacred by the Druids and the Celtic nations, who attributed valuable medicinal qualities to it, calling it allheal, or in Welsh quidhel. The Gothic nations also attached extraordinary qualities to it, and it is said in the Edda to have been the cause of the death of Balder....The Druids used to collect the mistletoe on the approach of the new year, with many mysterious ceremonies, such as cutting it with a golden sickle, and receiving it in a white cloth, the officiating Druids being also clad in white. This tended to increase the superstitious feeling of the people towards it, already aroused probably by the singular manner of its growth.¹⁵³

The tradition of kissing came into the picture, many say, through the “inspiration” of the Norse tradition associated with the god Baldur, who was said to have been killed by Loki. It is said that the death of Baldur brought winter into the world, “although the gods did eventually restore Baldur to life. Happily complying with Frigga's wishes, any two people passing under the plant from now on would celebrate Baldur's resurrection by kissing under the mistletoe.” When Baldur was resurrected, the goddess, Frigga (Baldur's mother – a goddess) “pronounced the mistletoe sacred, ordering that from now on it should bring love rather than death into the world.” It is said to be in compliance with these wishes that any two people who passed under the

¹⁵³ Sandys, William. *Christmas Carols Ancient and Modern*. London: Richard Beckley. 1833.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

mistletoe would kiss in celebration of the resurrection of this god and the retreat of the winter.¹⁵⁴

Laurels

It is of interest that way back in the latter portion of the third century, some of the Church fathers complained of the use of laurel wreaths adorning the doors of Christians. Then, like now, some believers are concerned that even though people were not necessarily using these things as elements of worship, the fact that they were used at all was cause for concern.

You will now-a-days find more doors of heathens without lamps and laurel-wreaths than of Christians. What does the case seem to be with regard to that species (of ceremony) also? If it is an idol's honour, without doubt an idol's honour is idolatry. If it is for a man's sake, let us again consider that all idolatry is for man's sake; let us again consider that all idolatry is a worship done to men, since it is generally agreed even among their worshippers that aforetime the gods themselves of the nations were men; and so it makes no difference whether that superstitious homage be rendered to men of a former age or of this. Idolatry is condemned, not on account of the persons which are set up for worship, but on account of those its observances, which pertain to demons.¹⁵⁵

Back in the 300's, the use of these things caused not a little stir in the church. The question one needs to ask oneself is, why *do* we use

¹⁵⁴ Beaulieu, David. *Landscaping @ About.Com*. "Norse Myths and Mistletoe History." About, Inc. New York Times Company. December 27, 2005.
<http://landscaping.about.com/cs/winterlandscaping1/a/mistletoe_2.htm> . 2005.

¹⁵⁵ Tertullian. 1996. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume I. "On Idolatry". Trans. The Rev. Alexander Roberts, D.D., and James Donaldson, LL.D., Sage Digital Library. Oregon; SAGE Software. (See also) Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Tertullian. 1996. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume I. "On Idolatry". December 24, 2005. <http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-03/anf03-07.htm#P765_315024> 2005.

ELEMENTS OF CHRISTMAS

holly, ivy, and green boughs? While we *might be able to physically*¹⁵⁶ “baptise” these things to “be” Christian, why would we want to do this? Do we really have the authority to be allowed to do this? Why do we seem to think we need to “fit in” with the world, in order to worship God? Why are our traditions more important than the plain word of God?

Christmas Trees

The use of evergreen trees within the worship of deities predates the Christian use of them; their long history, not surprisingly, dates back to the ancient pagans and their belief in the idea that the trees were a symbol of rebirth. Living trees were brought into Germanic households during the Yule festival and planted in tubs, so that they would last throughout the entire Yuletide, which was two-months long, beginning in November.

Still, Pastor Richard P. Bucher of the Evangelical Trinity Lutheran Church has spent a considerable amount of time researching the background of the Christmas tree and he believes that the modern Christmas tree most likely comes directly from two traditions. The first leg of this Christmas tree creation was that of the Paradise tree (a tree that was used in the “Paradise Play”, one of the Mystery Plays often acted out during the Middle Ages to illustrate the fall of man and the possibility of redemption through Jesus). The second ingredient for the tree was found in a tradition in Germany, where people would place candles on a pyramid shape.

Because of abuses that crept into the mystery plays (i.e., immoral behaviour [sic]), the Church forbade these plays during the fifteenth century. The people had grown so accustomed to the Paradise tree, however, that they began putting their own Paradise tree up in their homes on Dec. 24. They did so on Dec. 24 because this was the feast day of Adam and Eve (at least in the Eastern Church). The Paradise tree, as it had in the Paradise plays, symbolized both a tree of sin and a tree of life. For this reason, the people would decorate these trees with apples (representing the fruit of sin) and homemade wafers (like communion wafers which represented the fruit of life). Later, candy and sweets were added.

¹⁵⁶ Not spiritually, as this is an act only God can complete.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

Another custom was to be found in the homes of Christians on Dec. 24 since the late Middle Ages. A large candle called the "Christmas light," symbolizing Christ who is the light of the world, was lit on Christmas Eve. In western Germany, many smaller candles were set upon a wooden pyramid and lit. Besides the candles, other objects such as glass balls, tinsel, and the "star of Bethlehem" were placed on its top.

Though we cannot be certain, it seems highly likely that the first Christmas trees that appeared in Germany in the early sixteenth century were descendants of both of these customs: the Paradise tree and the Christmas pyramids and lights. The Paradise tree became our Christmas tree. Decorations that had been placed on the pyramids were transferred to the Christmas tree.¹⁵⁷

I would agree that these two backgrounds have some part in the Christmas tree tradition; I disagree with him in the dismissal of the third origin of the bringing in of the tree from outside, that of the Yule. *It is from this vein of the history that we get many of the "Christianized" symbols of everlasting life and rebirth.* It has since been integrated into the celebration we know as Christmas. We have since added it and it has been so long that the people today certainly no longer associate these pagan practices with the tree; even the Catholic Church admits these associations.

From this belief of the calends practice of greenery decorations (forbidden by Archbishop Martin of Braga, c. 575, P. L., LXXIII -- ***mistletoe was bequeathed by the Druids***) developed the Christmas tree, first definitely mentioned in 1605 at Strasburg, and introduced into France and England in 1840 only, by Princess Helena of Mecklenburg and the Prince Consort respectively.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Bucher, Pastor Richard P.. *Evangelical Trinity Lutheran Church*. "The Origin and Meaning of the Christmas Tree." December 26, 2005. <<http://users.rcn.com/tlclcms/chrtree.htm#Anchor16>>, Updated November 2000.

¹⁵⁸ Martindale, Cyril. *The Catholic Encyclopedia Volume III*. "Christmas". Ed. Robert Appleton Company, 1908. Online: <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03724b.htm>>. Ed. K. Knight, 2003

ELEMENTS OF CHRISTMAS

The Lutheran pastor goes on to say that because Jesus was killed on a tree, the Christmas tree is a suitable icon/symbol and reminder for our celebration of His birth, death and resurrection. This is a “nice” thought, except we are all pretty sure that the tree utilized for Christ’s execution was not an evergreen. (Almost anything can be made to be “Christian” in its intent, if we try hard enough.) Besides, even if the tree itself *was* a tradition that *might* have come from Christendom, its use is a problem simply based on *all of the other issues* surrounding the inappropriate tradition of Christmas in general. Finally, even if we have chosen it as the tree He was sacrificed on, we are skating close to idolatry, since we are told not to make graven images.

What does Scripture associate with our life in general and specifically, our everlasting life? The life is in the Blood.¹⁵⁹ The Cross of Christ mentioned in the Bible speaks of the synecdoche¹⁶⁰ of the entire sacrifice of Christ, not merely the tree.

At the risk of overemphasizing the point, I must also say that in Scripture, we are not told to pick up our *tree* daily and carry it; we are told to pick up our cross daily.... The cross was – and is – a symbol of Christ’s sacrifice first and foremost, as well as our choice to identify with that sacrifice.

Whatever the case, even back when the trees were first being introduced into the Christmas feast, there were critics to the practice. The pastor recounts the objections of at least one German scholar:

The great Lutheran theologian Johann Dannhauer wrote in his *The Milk of the Catechism* that “the Christmas or fir tree, which people set up in their houses, hang with dolls and sweets, and afterwards shake and deflower. . . . Whence comes this custom I know not; it is child’s play . . . Far better were it to point the children to the spiritual cedar-tree, Jesus

¹⁵⁹ Compare Genesis 9:41; Leviticus 17:11, 14; Deuteronomy 12:23; John 6:53, 54, and Acts 15:28, 29.

¹⁶⁰ A form of metaphor that speaks of a part of something to represent an entire thing. (i.e. “Come give me a hand”. Obviously, the person asking for help does not want just the hands of the person, but the person’s entire body to come to their aid.)

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

Christ.¹⁶¹

A common complaint by detractors of the Christmas tree comes from a passage in Jeremiah, regarding Asherah poles.

Hear the word which the LORD speaks to you, O house of Israel. Thus says the LORD: "Do not learn the way of the Gentiles; do not be dismayed at the signs of heaven, for the Gentiles are dismayed at them. For the customs of the peoples are futile; **for one cuts a tree from the forest, The work of the hands of the workman, with the ax. They decorate it with silver and gold; They fasten it with nails and hammers So that it will not topple. They are upright, like a palm tree, And they cannot speak; They must be carried, Because they cannot go by themselves. Do not be afraid of them, For they cannot do evil, Nor can they do any good.**"

Inasmuch as there is none like You, O LORD (You are great, and Your name is great in might), Who would not fear You, O King of the nations? For this is Your rightful due. For among all the wise men of the nations, And in all their kingdoms, There is none like You. But they are altogether dull-hearted and foolish; A wooden idol is a worthless doctrine. Silver is beaten into plates; It is brought from Tarshish, And gold from Uphaz, The work of the craftsman And of the hands of the metalsmith; Blue and purple are their clothing; They are all the work of skillful men. But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King. At His wrath the earth will tremble, And the nations will not be able to endure His indignation.¹⁶²

Here in its context, we can see that God is talking about Asherah poles; however, while I am well aware that most Christians do not choose to overtly worship/idolize their Christmas trees, we would do well to heed the warning that God *precedes* this passage that resembles our own practice of decking Christmas trees, "Do not learn the way of the Gentiles". Further, if the origin of these trees is from that of pagan

¹⁶¹ Bucher, Pastor Richard P. *Evangelical Trinity Lutheran Church*. "The Origin and Meaning of the Christmas Tree." December 26, 2005. <<http://users.rcn.com/tlclcms/chrtree.htm#Anchor16>>, Updated November 2000.

¹⁶² Jeremiah Chapter 10, the entire chapter

ELEMENTS OF CHRISTMAS

fertility worship, we should not keep this tradition. Finally, even if the tree *is* uniquely “Christian” in its tradition, we must check our hearts to ensure that *nothing* crowds or comes alongside our worship of God.

As New Testament believers, our altar is in our hearts (since the Holy Spirit lives in us). When we choose to bring the tree into our homes and make it our centrepieces, we have put ourselves in a position where we *are* in danger of placing them alongside the altars of God. As a Christian who used to be enamoured with the entire celebration, I remember spending hours looking for “just the right tree”, painstakingly decorating it, (once we got it home and set it up, that is) and then placing a number of gifts under its ornament and light-clad boughs. After all of the work was done, often, we would turn off all of the lights and just stare at it – sometimes for an hour or so at a time – marvelling at its beauty. This is also the experience of most Christians I know; not just mine.

This reality is exemplified in the song, “Oh Christmas Tree”. Central to the celebration known as Christmas *is* the tree, whether we would like to admit it or not.

Gift Giving

The gift-giving feature of Christmas is an interesting one. There are many issues with this part of the Christmas tradition. Some of the problems with this custom include the reality that again, it is likely that the gift giving was adopted into the mix from the keeping of the Saturnalia, among other things. This aspect of the pagan celebration has already been mentioned throughout the earlier portion of this book, so I will not go back over this facet of the custom.

There are other things that seem to make little sense with this ritual, though, not the least of which are the recipients of the gifts, the fact that the custom requires reciprocation of gifts, and the focus that these gifts seem to bring.

Who Should be Getting the Gifts?

I have heard it said by many, many people that Christians give gifts to each other in honour of the gifts of frankincense, gold and myrrh given to the Christ Child. Logically, if we are holding this celebration in honour of our Lord’s birth, it begs the question, why are we giving

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

gifts to *one another*? To be perfectly honest, if a celebration were being held in my honour, I would hope that the gifts were going to me, not everyone else.

When I have brought up this inconsistency to other believers, they generally say something like, "But Jesus is not here to give gifts to, and we are exemplifying Christian love in our gift-giving; we are also imitating the wise men."

My response to this line of reasoning is first of all that Jesus *is* here; if the Christian thinks they *must* celebrate His birthday on this day - with gifts, should they not choose to spend their time in His service, preaching the pure, unadulterated Gospel, rather than spending Christmas morning furiously opening up innumerable gifts under the tree?¹⁶³ Secondly, it seems to me that the thing dearest to our Saviour are souls, since he gave us only one commission:

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.¹⁶⁴

Secondly, if the act of giving at Christmas occurred in true Christian spirit, it would not be a gift *exchange*. The Christian would give with-

¹⁶³ I am aware of a family here in Calgary who, while they still put up their tree and "oooh and ahhhh" at it, has chosen to give all of the money they used to spend on gifts to a sponsored child; they give vouchers to their family members and friends saying that a certain amount of money they sent to this sponsored child went in the name of that person. This couple is happy, but their entire extended family, save one or two, thinks they are crazy and don't like the tradition they have started at all. Why, do you think, is it difficult for the family to take? It comes down to the reality that the stuff is of central importance to most people, even believers (certainly to this family of believers), on Christmas Day. Contrary to our persistent assertions, Jesus is often *not* the centre of most of our Christmas Day festivities.

¹⁶⁴ Matthew 28:18-20

ELEMENTS OF CHRISTMAS

out ever expecting anything back or feeling like they have been slighted if someone did not reciprocate. Again, generally, this is not the case.

Thirdly, if we were to give gifts in the spirit of Christianity, we would do so to all of our enemies, not just our loved ones. Jesus told us to love our enemies; how many times have you seen anyone – Christian or Pagan – give gifts to their enemies?

Finally, if we were truly imitating the wise men, we would be willing to follow Jesus to wherever He is and pay homage to Him in our gifts; we wouldn't pay homage to the idols of commercialism, greed, and materialism thinly wrapped in the cellophane of Christian piety.

Do Not Love the Things of the World

Often, Christians are just as guilty as the rest of the world in over-spending at this time of year, too. Most Christians try to justify this over-expenditure with platitudes and niceties that may include anything from “I sent an Operation Christmas Child box overseas and I pay tithe ... I deserve to be able to spend some money” to “I make sure I am not spending more than my budget allows”.

Have you ever noticed that, if we are to be completely honest with ourselves, there would be little, if any, draw to the continuation of this celebration if we actually *did* honour the Lord with gifts to Him rather than gifts to one another. The most memorable portion of Christmas for most, if the truth be known, is the opening of the presents, followed closely by the overindulgence at the table.

The Christian world in North America is just as addicted to the thrill of “stuff” as the general populace. Starting as early as September last year, I noticed murmurings of “have you started your Christmas shopping yet” rumbling through our local congregation.

If Jesus was really the central focus in this celebration, most of the conversation would be about Him, not the tree and the items people are going to put under it. Again, I would caution the believer to check their hearts to see if they have erected something other than the worship of God next to the altar there.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

I John warns the followers of Christ:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.¹⁶⁵

I am neither saying that we are not allowed to have anything nor that we are not permitted to give gifts to each other; we as believers do, however, need to be careful not to fall into the same trap as the rest of the world – and it seems that most have.

Conclusion about Christmas Gifts and Christmas Trees

We keep coming back to the central question – if we are truly Evangelicals – self-proclaimed People of the Book, why are we utilising the things that are decidedly not biblical to “celebrate” the birth of our Lord?

Here are some questions related to the gifts and trees specifically:

Why are we using the gifts given to Christ as an excuse to overindulge in the world’s treasures? Why have we continued to partake in the excesses of a long-celebrated pagan custom?

If we were to take a look into the home of a Christian on Christmas morning and the non-Christian on Christmas morning, just as they were both about to open gifts under the tree, would we see many differences, besides the choice of some of the gifts, perhaps? I would guess that answer would be “no”, based not only on my own celebration in the past, but the experience of many, many other Christians.

If we must celebrate on this day, then should not the gifts we give be given to the Lord, rather than in honour of the Lord?

Here are another few questions: notwithstanding all of the other ob-

¹⁶⁵ I John 2:15-17

ELEMENTS OF CHRISTMAS

jections I have already raised, would this celebration be as exciting if we took away the tree and the gifts and the lights? Would most Christians even *bother* to observe it? How many Christians would even be willing to give the *tree* part of the celebration up? If you find yourself balking strongly at the thought, I would ask you to check your heart; likely there *is* something set up in the altar of your heart alongside the Lord.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ I am not advocating the lack of celebration; the concern here is that people are choosing to encourage materialism in the name of Jesus.

10

Chapter 10: Santa Claus

Many Christian families still incorporate Santa Claus into the mix, as well. Even in my Bible College, a notable professor dressed up as Santa and carted off one of the other professors at a Christmas Eve chapel shortly after I began attending classes there.

What does the integration of this legend/man bring to a celebration supposedly reserved for the Lord in the lives of Christians? Why do some of us insist on lying to our children, not only about the date of our Saviour's birth, but also the origin of some of the gifts given to them, ostensibly in the name of Jesus?

Who Was Santa Claus, Anyway

The heart of the "Santa Claus" we know today comes from a variety of origins. Some say that the only origin of this symbol comes from St. Nicholas of Turkey. Of this "saint", the *Catholic Encyclopedia* says this:

Though he is one of the most popular saints in the Greek as well as the Latin Church, there **is scarcely anything historically certain about him** except that he was Bishop of Myra in the fourth century. Some of the main points in his legend are as follows: He was born at Parara, a city of Lycia in Asia Minor; in his youth he made a pilgrimage to Egypt and Palestine; shortly after his return he became Bishop of

SANTA CLAUS

Myra; cast into prison during the persecution of Diocletian, he was released after the accession of Constantine, and was present at the Council of Nicaea. In 1087 Italian merchants stole his body at Myra, bringing it to Bari in Italy. The numerous miracles St. Nicholas is said to have wrought, both before and after his death, are outgrowths of a long tradition.... He is patron of mariners, merchants, bakers, travellers, children, etc.... In Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands, they have the custom of making him the secret purveyor of gifts to children on 6 December, the day on which the Church celebrates his feast; in the United States and some other countries St. Nicholas has become identified with Santa Claus who distributes gifts to children on Christmas Eve.¹⁶⁷

That is amazing to me; this man, St. Nicholas, to whom many religious people are **amply** devoted, is virtually a stranger. As we read in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, little is honestly known about this St. Nicholas, save that he was a bishop. We do know that the most popular tradition surrounding his dubious claim to the “patron saint of children” possibly stems from the legend that he (St. Nicholas, not Santa Claus) put some money into the stockings of three poor young girls, whose parents felt compelled to sell them both into slavery (or possibly prostitution) because they did not have dowries for them. This gift apparently thwarted such an event by providing the girls with a dowry so they could each get married.¹⁶⁸

As in the case of almost every other custom surrounding the feast of Christmas, there are various elements from both the Christian and the pagan worlds that eventually created the final product of the “Santa Claus” we know today; its only source was certainly **not** St. Nicholas. In their article on Christmas, the online Encyclopedia, *Wikipedia*, discusses the marriage of the Christian and the pagan elements that went into the creation of the Santa Claus we now know today:

¹⁶⁷ Ott, Michael. *The Catholic Encyclopedia Volume XI*. “St. Nicholas of Myra”. Ed. Robert Appleton Company, 1908. Online: Ed. K. Knight <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11063b.htm>>, 2003.

¹⁶⁸ History Channel. “Christmas Trees”. December 24, 2005. <<http://www.historychannel.com/exhibits/holidays/christmas/santa.html>>, 2005.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

Prior to the Germanic peoples' conversion to Christianity, Germanic folklore contained stories about the god Odin (Wodan), who would each year, at Yule, have a great hunting party accompanied by his fellow gods and the fallen warriors residing in his realm. Children would place their boots, filled with carrots, straw or sugar, near the chimney for Odin's flying horse, Sleipnir, to eat. Odin would then reward those children for their kindness by replacing Sleipnir's food with gifts or candy [Siefker, chap. 9, esp. 171-173]. This practice survived in Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands after the adoption of Christianity and became associated with Saint Nicholas. Children still place their straw filled shoes at the chimney every winter night, and Saint Nicholas (who, unlike Santa, is still riding a horse) rewards them with candy and gifts. Odin's appearance was often similar to that of Saint Nicholas, being depicted as an old, mysterious man with a beard. (Other features, like the absence of one eye, are not found in Saint Nicholas.) This practice in turn came to America via the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam prior to the British seizure in the 17th century, and evolved into the hanging of socks or stockings at the fireplace.

Another early folk tale, originating among the Germanic tribes, tells of a holy man (sometimes Saint Nicholas), and a demon (sometimes the Devil, Krampus, or a troll). The story states that the land was terrorized by a monster who at night would slither down the chimneys and slaughter children (disembowelling them or stuffing them up the flue, or keeping them in a sack to eat later). The holy man sought out the demon, and tricked it with blessed or magical shackles (in some versions the same shackles that imprisoned Christ prior to the crucifixion, in other versions the shackles were those used to hold St. Peter or Paul of Tarsus); the demon was trapped and forced to obey the saint's orders. The saint ordered him to go to each house and make amends, by delivering gifts to the children. Depending on the version, the saint either made the demon fulfil this task every year, or the demon was so disgusted by the act of good will that it chose to be sent back to Hell.

Yet other versions have the demon reform under the saint's orders, and go on to recruit other elves and imps into helping him, thus becoming Santa Claus. In an alternate Dutch version, the saint is aided by Moorish slaves, commonly typified as Zwarte Piet ("Black Peter"). Some tales depict

SANTA CLAUS

Zwarte Piet beating bad children with a rod or even taking them to Spain (formerly ruled by the Moors) in a sack.

Another form of the above tale in Germany is of the Pelznickel or Belsnickle ("Furry Nicholas") who visited naughty children in their sleep. The name originated [sic] from the fact that the person appeared to be a huge beast since he was covered from head to toe in furs.¹⁶⁹

What a sordid past. Many believe that the famous "Ghost of Christmas Past" in Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* was fashioned after "Father Christmas", the pagan version of Santa Claus, as well. No matter which way we turn, it appears that this figure is not what many think he is.

Kriss Kringle

One of the more common names associated with Santa Claus is that of Kriss Kringle. Although many are unaware, this name is actually a derivation of the Christ child.

The feast day of Nicholas, when presents were received, was traditionally observed on December 6. After the Reformation, German Protestants encouraged veneration of the Christkindl (Christ child) as a gift giver on his own feast day, December 25. When the Nicholas tradition prevailed, it became attached to Christmas itself. Because the saint's life is so unreliably documented, Pope Paul VI ordered the feast of Saint Nicholas dropped from the official Roman Catholic calendar in 1969.¹⁷⁰ The term Christkindl evolved to Kriss Kringle, another nickname for Santa Claus.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Wikipedia Contributors. *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*. "Santa Claus". December 27, 2005. <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Santa_Claus&oldid=32863471> Last Updated; 27 December 2005.

¹⁷⁰ Although they dropped the feast day, they certainly did not "un-saint" this man. Interesting.

¹⁷¹ Brunvand, Jan Harold B.A., M.A., Ph.D. Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia. "*Santa Claus*," December 30, 2005. Microsoft Corporation. <http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761579679/Santa_Claus.html> 1997-2005.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

Many Christians continue to have Santa Claus in their Christmas feast because of the (tenuous) connection to Christianity. In reality, as we have already seen, little is even known about him.

Sainthood

At best, the original St. Nicholas was a man who chose to live life after the pattern of Christ. Because we know neither his theology nor his heart, we cannot be sure of these things, but it is a fair assumption.

Whatever the case, the man has been “immortalized” by the Roman Catholic Church by their process of “canonizing” him as a “saint”. It is because of this canonization, the celebration of his feast day, and the subsequent integration of this tradition (along with the other pagan elements) that has led to the popularity of Santa Claus. As such, I believe it would be helpful to take a look at what is involved with the Roman Catholic notion of what becoming a saint means. From there, we will compare this with the biblical idea of sainthood.

The Catholic Perspective

In this process, many different things need to occur. In an official News Release by the Vatican Information Service, the process of canonization is outlined:

"1. Canon norms regarding the procedure to be followed for causes of saints are contained in the Apostolic Constitution 'Divinus Perfectionis Magister,' promulgated by John Paul II on January 25, 1983.

"2. To begin a cause it is necessary for at least 5 years to have passed since the death of the candidate. This is to allow greater balance and objectivity in evaluating the case and to let the emotions of the moment dissipate.

"3. The bishop of the diocese in which the person whose beatification is being requested died is responsible for beginning the investigation. The promoter group ('Actor Causae'): diocese, parish, religious congregation, association, asks the bishop through the postulator for the opening of the investigation. The bishop, once the 'nulla osta' of the Holy See is obtained, forms a diocesan tribunal for this purpose. Witnesses are called before the tribunal to recount concrete facts on the exercise of Christian virtues considered heroic, that is, the theological virtues: faith, hope and charity, and the cardinal virtues: prudence,

SANTA CLAUS

justice, temperance and fortitude, and others specific to his state in life. In addition, all documents regarding the candidate must be gathered. At this point he is entitled to the title of Servant of God.

"4. Once the diocesan investigation is finished, the acts and documentation are passed on to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. The public copy used for further work is put together here. The postulator, resident in Rome, follows the preparation of the 'Positio', or summary of the documentation that proves the heroic exercise of virtue, under the direction of a relator of the Congregation. The 'Positio' undergoes an examination (theological) by nine theologians who give their vote. If the majority of the theologians are in favour, the cause is passed on for examination by cardinals and bishops who are members of the congregation. They hold meetings twice a month. If their judgment is favourable, the prefect of the congregation presents the results of the entire course of the cause to the Holy Father, who gives his approval and authorizes the congregation to draft the relative decree. The public reading and promulgation of the decree follows.

"5. For the beatification of a confessor a miracle attributed to the Servant of God, verified after his death, is necessary. The required miracle must be proven through the appropriate canonical investigation, following a procedure analogous to that for heroic virtues. This one too is concluded with the relative decree. Once the two decrees are promulgated (regarding the heroic virtues and the miracle) the Holy Father decides on beatification, which is the concession of public worship, limited to a particular sphere. With beatification the candidate receives the title of Blessed.

These miracles are said to occur when the faithful petition these dead people. Often, miracles encompass one of the faithful being cured of a disease, as a "direct result" of the person praying to the dead candidate for the same.

"6. For canonization another miracle is needed, attributed to the intercession of the Blessed and having occurred after his beatification. The methods for ascertainment of the affirmed miracle are the same as those followed for beatification. Canonization is understood as the concession of public worship in the Universal Church. Pontifical infallibility is involved. With canonization, the Blessed acquires the title of Saint." ¹⁷²

¹⁷² Pope John Paul II. Vatican Information Service. Notes on *Divinus Perfectionis Magister*. Holy See Press Office. September 12, 1997 as quoted by Flanagan, Paul and Robert Schihl. *Catholic Biblical Apologetics*. "The Canonization of Saints". December 31, 2005.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

Again, more miracles are required from the dead “Blessed” person, in order for them to be further carried along in the process of the canonization of a saint. In the Roman Catholic economy, not every believer is considered to be a saint. It is only after they pass this rigorous process that they are given this title. Once the title is conferred on the person, the faithful are allowed to worship these people, keep and venerate the “relics” associated with the saints, and devote themselves to “cultus” associated with specific saints.

One of the many practices associated with Catholic sainthood, is that of giving these saints “lesser worship” (*dulia*) and praying to these dead people for miracles, protection, and favour in the sight of God.

The true origin of canonization and beatification must be sought in the Catholic doctrine of the worship (*cultus*), invocation, and intercession of the saints. As was taught by St. Augustine (*Quaest. in Heptateuch.*, lib. II, n. 94; *Contra Faustum*, lib. XX, xxi), Catholics, while giving to God alone adoration strictly so-called, honour the saints because of the Divine supernatural gifts which have earned them eternal life, and through which they reign with God in the heavenly fatherland as His chosen friends and faithful servants. In other words, Catholics honour God in His saints as the loving distributor of supernatural gifts. The worship of *latria* (*latreia*), or strict adoration, is given to God alone; the worship of *dulia* (*douleia*), or honour and humble reverence, is paid the saints; the worship of *hyperdulia* (*hyperdouleia*), a higher form of *dulia*, belongs, on account of her greater excellence, to the Blessed Virgin Mary.¹⁷³

The rationalization for this “lower form of worship” stems from the Roman Catholic belief in the “communion of the saints” – the idea that

<<http://www.catholicapologetics.org/ap070400.htm>>. Copyright 1985-2004.

¹⁷³ Beccari, Cammilus. *The Catholic Encyclopedia Volume II*. “Beatification and Canonization”. Ed. Robert Appleton Company, 1907. Online: Ed. K. Knight, December 27, 2005. <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02364b.htm>>, Last Updated October 6, 2005.

SANTA CLAUS

the believers in heaven are able to truly commune – and communicate – with the believers who are still on earth.

In the eleventh session of the Council of Chalcedon (451) we find the Fathers exclaiming, "Flavianus lives after death! May the Martyr pray for us!" If we accept this doctrine of the worship of the saints, of which there are innumerable evidences in the writings of the Fathers and the liturgies of the Eastern and Western Churches, we shall not wonder at the loving care with which the Church committed to writing the sufferings of the early martyrs, sent these accounts from one gathering of the faithful to another, and promoted the veneration of the martyrs.¹⁷⁴

The Roman Catholic faithful are taught to believe that they have the right to be able to give "lesser worship" to these dead people and talk to them through prayer, so that they might be able to ask things on behalf of the live person. They also teach that since these believers who have gone before us have attained that which we have not yet attained (that is, perfection) and since we ask one another to pray for each other, it is appropriate to be able to ask them, through prayer, to petition to God on their behalf.

The rationale is that, while Jesus is the one Mediator between man and God, this mediation deals only with *salvation*. When it comes to other things, such as healing, finding a lost loved one or any number of other things, many of the Catholic clergy and laity petition the saints. In the words of the Catholic Encyclopedia, "If St. Paul beseeches the brethren (Romans 15:30; 2 Corinthians 1:11; Colossians 4:3; Ephesians 6:18-19) to help him by their prayers for him to God, we must with even greater reason maintain that we can be helped by the prayers of the saints, and ask their intercession with humility. If we may beseech those who still live on earth, why not those who live in heaven?" So goes the argument.

They would further bolster their argument with their interpretation of Hebrews 12:1, of which they would say the saints are cheering for us; it is even "proven" in this text. Therefore, since they can see us and

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

cheer us on, why not ask them to pray for us. In her paper on Hebrews 12:1-3, Carmen J. Bryant discusses the notion as presented by the Roman Catholic Church and often accepted by Protestants and Evangelicals:

Our encouragement should not come from an indistinct, nebulous crowd whose cheers we must imagine but from the pages of Scripture. It is here that the lives of the saints are written for our benefit, as Paul has affirmed in Rom. 15:4: "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

Everett F. Harrison comments,

The use of the Scriptures promotes "endurance" and supplies "encouragement." Both may be learned by precept and example from these records of the past. These two elements are intimately connected with hope, for the endurance is worthwhile if it takes place on a course that leads to a glorious future, and the encouragement provides exactly that assurance. . . . Endurance and encouragement are ultimately God's gift, though they are mediated through the Scriptures.

It is significant that of all the names recorded in Hebrews 11, none are from the New Testament era. Hebrews is generally thought to have been written between 60 and 100 A.D.¹⁷⁵ By 60 A.D. several had already fallen as martyrs. Stephen was stoned around 36 or 37 A.D. James fell to Herod's sword about 44 A.D. It is unknown how many others may have been martyred during the ensuing persecution. Yet all the examples in Hebrews 11 are from the Old Testament. Verses 39-40 would confirm that the author has in mind the heroes of the faith that lived prior to the establishment of Christianity, because "only together with us"—those under the New Covenant—"would they be made perfect." The saints are not witnesses of us but to us. They encourage by example, not by cheers and affirmation. When they were running the race, who comprised their cheering section? Who was their encouragement? It was God who was watching and God who cared enough about them to sustain them through life's difficulties. Where was their focus? On God and on the heavenly prize (Heb. 11:10, 16, 35).

¹⁷⁵ Bryant, Carmen J. "Who's Watching? Removing the Cloud of Witnesses from the Amphitheater." Western Seminary. December 31, 2005.

SANTA CLAUS

Much of the legend associated with Santa Claus and the feast of Christmas comes from this practice of giving saints “lesser worship”. It was on December 6 that the Catholic and Orthodox Churches set aside a day as the “Feast of St. Nicholas”.

In Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands, they have the custom of making him the secret purveyor of gifts to children on 6 December, the day on which the Church celebrates his feast; in the United States and some other countries St. Nicholas has become identified with Santa Claus who distributes gifts to children on Christmas eve. His relics are still preserved in the church of San Nicola in Bari; up to the present day an oily substance, known as Manna di S. Nicola, which is highly valued for its medicinal powers, is said to flow from them.¹⁷⁶

As believers of the Book, we are to put these ideas as laid out in the Roman Catholic teaching in subjection to the plain teaching of the Book.

What is a Biblical “Saint”?

So, we have learned that the Roman Catholic Church has a very elaborate set of rules to follow, in order to “saint” someone.

Strong’s Concordance tells us that the Old Testament word for “saint” is קֹדֶשׁ qodesh (*ko’-desh*) and when it is attributed to people it means that they are holy, separated out for God, consecrated to God, set apart for God. The New Testament word for “saint” is the same word as “holy”. The Greek word is ἅγιος (*hǎ’-gē-ōs*) and again, it means to be holy, separated out for God, consecrated to God, set apart for God.¹⁷⁷

<<http://www.westernseminary.edu/books/Faculty/whoswatching.pdf>>, 2001.

¹⁷⁶ Ott, Michael. *The Catholic Encyclopedia Volume XI*. “St. Nicholas of Myra”. Ed. Robert Appleton Company, 1908. Online: Ed. K. Knight <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11063b.htm>>, 2003.

¹⁷⁷ Strong, James. *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Online Bible. Vancouver, BC: Timnathserah Inc., 1995-2001.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

From all indications, a “saint” is simply someone who has accepted the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on their behalf, has become “born again”¹⁷⁸ and has agreed that he or she is going to follow the teachings of the Lord,¹⁷⁹ through faith out of a motive of love.¹⁸⁰ In essence, the word, saint, simply means to be made holy, set apart for God.

So then, according to the plain teaching of the word of God, each and every person who has chosen to accept through faith and follow God, are considered to be “set apart for God”.

An Evangelical Perspective on Consulting the Dead

In the last section, we determined that the Bible teaches that *all* believers in the Lord are considered to be “saints”, not just those who the Roman Catholic Church recognises and canonizes. We also know that it is perfectly appropriate to ask other *live* believers to pray on our behalf, according to the Word,¹⁸¹ it is also okay for us to petition the Lord on behalf of another person.¹⁸² The question that needs to be an-

¹⁷⁸ John 3:1-7

¹⁷⁹ As Jesus talked about throughout the New Testament, if we love Him, we will obey Him.

¹⁸⁰ Here are the instances in Scripture where the word, “saint” or “saints” is mentioned (According to the New King James Version): Deuteronomy 33:2; 3; 1Samuel 2:9; II Chronicles 6:41; Job 15:15; Psalm 16:3; 30:4; 31:23; 34:9; 37:28; 50:5; 52:9; 79:2; 85:8; 89:5, 7; 97:10; 116:15; 132:9, 16; 145:10; 148:14; 149:1, 5, 9; Proverb 2:8; Daniel 7:18, 21, 22, 25, 27; Zechariah 14:5; Matthew 27:52; Acts 9:13, 32, 41; 26:10; Romans 1:7; 8:27; 12:13; 15:25, 26, 31; 16:2, 15; I Corinthians 1:2; 6:1, 2; 14:33; 16:1, 15; II Corinthians 1:1; 8:4; 9:1, 12; 13:13; Ephesians 1:1, 15, 18; 2:19; 3:8, 3:18; 4:12; 5:3; 6:18; Philippians 1:1; 4:21, 22; Colossians 1:2, 4, 12, 26; I Thessalonians 3:13; II Thessalonians 1:10; I Timothy 5:10; Philemon 1:5, 7; Hebrews 6:10; 13:24; Jude 1:3; 1:14; Revelation 5:8; 8:3, 4; 11:18; 13:7, 10; 14:12; 15:3; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:8; 20:9

¹⁸¹ Jesus prayed to the Father for believers in John 17:9 ff; Paul talked about praying for others, as well, in numerous texts, such as Colossians 1:9.

¹⁸² I Thessalonians 5:25; II Thessalonians 3:1; Hebrews 13:18

SANTA CLAUS

swered then, is this, “Since it is all right to ask live believers to pray for us, is it *also* okay to ask those who have gone before us and died in Christ to pray to God on our behalf?”

In the Catholic notion of the “communion of the saints”, both live and dead believers in Christ are able to communicate with one another and help one another. In their theology, it is not only thought to be all right, it is encouraged.

While they [the Roman Catholic Church] do not approve of the idea of calling upon the dead to give information to them about the future or to talking with them about what one should do about a certain situation, (such as Saul did with Samuel through the witch of Endor), nevertheless, they believe it is perfectly appropriate to talk to those believers who have already passed from life into death. This “talking” is done through prayer.

For the most part, Evangelicals have rejected this read of the idea of the “communion of the saints”. We would say that while we are certainly all one in Christ Jesus, whether we are “asleep” in Him or still here on the earth, the act of asking dead believers to pray for us is neither biblically sanctioned nor biblically illustrated; as such, it is inappropriate to speak to them or petition to them on our behalf. It is also not appropriate to pray *for* those who have already passed away before us.

Scripture tells us that we are *not* supposed to be in the habit of talking to the dead. It must be said that the Roman Catholic Church officially denounces the act of *calling up* the dead, as well as the dubious act of kything,¹⁸³ but in other, more subtle ways, they approve of it.

In the Old Testament, when talking about those who consult the dead, a single word is not used; instead, a phrase is utilised, אֱלֹהֵי-הַמֵּתִים

¹⁸³ That is, the practice of allowing another “spirit” to meet with yours, in order to help you through tough situations; they talk about doing this with the Spirit of God, but the “communion of the saints” is also discussed whenever this practice is mentioned in Catholic circles.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

שׂרר:י¹⁸⁴ “vedoresh (seek, enquire, consult) el-hametim (dead man, dead body)”, which simply means “one who consults the dead; one who seeks the dead, one who enquires of the dead.” While this certainly *can* deal with the future, even talking with or inquiring of the dead is strictly prohibited in the Scriptures. The English translation of this phrase is “Necromancer”, which comes from the Greek words, νεκρός (nekρός) "dead" and μαντεία (manteía) "divination". It is from this Greek word/English translation that we misunderstand or allow such a narrow read of the text.

Proponents of the Roman Catholic viewpoint would say that believers are not “dead”, but merely “asleep” in the Lord. That seems logical, except that within the context of the most often used passage, Hebrews 12:1-3, the witnesses the passage speaks about are mentioned throughout Hebrews 11.

Over and over in this chapter, the believers who have gone before are definitely called “dead”; not necessarily in the sense of the spirit, but certainly in the sense of not being on the earth. Listen to Ms. Bryant’s delineation of this difference:

If the saints in heaven can communicate with us, what is to prevent us from communicating with them? In fact, the Catholic Church has argued for this for centuries. The biblical prohibition against consulting the dead, they say, doesn't apply to the saints. The saints are not dead; they are alive. Dead only applies to those who are spiritually dead, not to those who are alive in heaven with God. Furthermore, it is claimed, the prohibition is not against contacting the dead but against conjuring them up, especially to get information out of them. With such equivocation, communication with the dead is allowed and even encouraged on the condition that it be done through prayer and not through a séance. The dead respond by interceding for us. In fact, they must do so, for the saints are to pray for one another. Bodily death does not abrogate the command. The writer of Hebrews, however, does not balk at the word dead. Abel is dead; Abraham is dead. His point is that they died while be-

¹⁸⁴ Deuteronomy 18:11; *Ben Asher Morphological Hebrew Text*. The Online Bible. Vancouver, BC: Timnathserah Inc., 1995-2001.

SANTA CLAUS

lieving in the promises of God. They are very much contrasted with us who are still alive.¹⁸⁵

The Catholic Church would have us believe that it is more than appropriate to pray to the saints, since this is doing no more than asking them to intercede on our behalf, much like we do for one another here on earth. However, there are some really large differences here:

Within the Old Testament, we hear that believers of the Living God should not seek the dead on behalf of the living. We should seek Elohim – God alone. Listen to the command given in Isaiah:

And when they say to you, "Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter," **should not a people seek their God?** Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! **If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.** They will pass through it hard pressed and hungry; and it shall happen, when they are hungry, that they will be enraged and curse their king and their God, and look upward. Then they will look to the earth, and see trouble and darkness, gloom of anguish; and they will be driven into darkness.¹⁸⁶

This passage is not only dealing with consulting the dead about the future, but seeking their comfort, counsel, intercession, healing, whatever the case. The fact is, when people choose to seek the dead, even the “saints”, they are using these things as a replacement for God, whether they realize it or not.

A Comparison Between Jesus and Santa Claus

So far, we have explored the various traditions that have come together to create the character we know today as Santa Claus. We have

¹⁸⁵ Bryant, Carmen J. “Who’s Watching? Removing the Cloud of Witnesses from the Amphitheater.” Western Seminary. December 31, 2005. <<http://www.westernseminary.edu/books/Faculty/whoswatching.pdf>>, 2001.

¹⁸⁶ Isaiah 8:19-22

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

seen that his caricature is an amalgamation of both the (seemingly) holy and the profane. Some Christians refuse to acknowledge this aspect of the history and point only to the Christian background.

I would like to ask these people, “Even if Santa Claus *was* derived from the stories of the acts of a saint from times past, why do you feel the need to lie to people, especially young people, about the idea that he might be travelling through the world, in order to give gifts to children? At best, he is right now with the Lord; certainly not capable of affecting the world.”

Is it appropriate that we, as People of the Book, lie to our children about *anything*? The word of God tells us that we are *not* to bear false witness. Doubtless, telling children that Santa Claus is coming to give them gifts is an untruth.

There is more danger surrounding this tradition than we think, too. If we lie to them about such things, there is a possibility that they will associate the Lord Himself with lies, since Christmas is still very closely associated with Jesus, at least from the average Christian’s view. Even non-believers associate Jesus with this celebration, at least on a cursory level.

I have actually heard such arguments by people who have become disillusioned by their parent’s well-meaning, but misplaced desire to inject some “magic” into their children’s lives. The argument goes something like this, “I used to believe in the tooth fairy, but she wasn’t real. My mom and dad told me about the Easter Bunny, but it was just a lie, too. Then, there was Santa Claus. I used to believe he would come down the chimney on Christmas Eve to give good girls and boys gifts; he was a lie too. I think that Jesus is the same; I think my parents and their parents before them made him to be more than he really was, just so children could have something to believe in.”

Anyone who cares to take a little more than a superficial glance at the attributes given to Santa Claus will quickly see that this invention is more than simply a figment of people’s imagination; Santa Claus is, in this writer’s opinion, however, the true “spirit of Christmas”, since he

SANTA CLAUS

is almost universally accepted by people in the world, even if Jesus is not. Let's take a comparative look at Jesus and Santa Claus:¹⁸⁷

| Jesus | Santa Claus |
|--|---|
| ... is omniscient – He is able to discern the thoughts of people (Matthew 9:14; Luke 6:22; 6:8; 11:17) | ...is omniscient. According to the popular song, “Santa Claus is Coming to Town”, this being “knows when you are sleeping, he knows when you’re awake; he knows if you’ve been bad or good, so be good for goodness’ sake.” |
| ...is eternal (Revelation 1:8) | ...lives forever |
| ...wants the children to come to Him. (Matthew 19:14) | ... wants all of the children to come to him. In fact, we bring them to him in our malls, in our towns, and even in our photography studios. |
| ...is the Giver of Life and Life abundantly (John 10:10) | ...is the giver of materialism, greed, and selfishness in abundance |
| ...is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6) | ...is the rewarder of those who seek him to get stuff. Children seek him and find him, through the malls, through letters and through the many, many stories that are told in our media. |
| ...is the Judge of the Living and the Dead (II Timothy 4:1; I Peter 4:5) | ...judges whether children are good or bad |
| ... is the Prince of Peace, the Image of God (Isaiah 9:6; Hebrews 1:3) | ... is the symbol of World Peace, the image of the Christmas Season |
| ...is the Christ Child – He is the Messiah | ... is Kriss Kringle (which is a twisting of the German term, |

¹⁸⁷ Adapted from *The GOOD NEWSletter*, “Jesus versus Santa”. Former Catholics for Christ, Oct/Nov/Dec, 1997.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

| | |
|--|--|
| | Christ Child) |
| ... was a carpenter | ... is a toy carpenter. |
| ... gave us the Greatest gift of all when He chose to die on a tree (Galatians 3:13) | ...puts gifts under an evergreen tree. |
| ...is the Holy one of God (Mark 1:24); He is holy (Acts 4:27, 30) | ...is holy (the Spanish word for “saint” or “holy” is Santa) |

This is by no means, a complete comparison of the two, either.¹⁸⁸

Why are We Including Santa Claus as a Part of a Celebration Supposedly Reserved for the Lord Alone?

As believers in Jesus Christ and followers of the Book, why are we venerating Santa Claus and lying to our children about his participation in Christmas (aka St. Nicholas, Father Christmas, the Holly King), who, at best was a fellow believer; at worst, is a distraction from the True Messiah, a pretender to the throne? He edges into the children’s hearts and sets himself up as the god of Christmas in the hearts of children, young and old.

The fact that this icon is so integrated with the perception of what Christmas is, cannot be a mistake; the best way to lead people away from the Truth is not to completely deny it, but to mix it with lies. This is precisely what has happened, not only with Santa Claus, but with Christmas itself. It has taken the idea that the Lord became flesh and dwelt among us and has polluted this teaching with notions associated with the worship of pagan deities.

¹⁸⁸ For those who are interested in a more in-depth treatment of the comparison/contrast of Jesus and Santa, please take a look at the website, “Santa Claus, the Great Imposter” <http://www.jesus-is-savior.com/False%20Religions/Other%20Pagan%20Mumbo-Jumbo/santa_claus.htm> by Terry Watkins.

11

Chapter 11: Carolling (Wassailing)

As with every other custom associated with Christmas, the act of wassailing predates Christianity. Encarta tells its readers,

There is another curious Twelfth Night custom which took place until fairly recent times in Devon and Somerset. This was apple-tree wassailing, a ritual of undoubtedly pagan origins, where cider was drunk from the wassail bowl, and what remained of it was sprinkled on apple trees to ensure fruitfulness during the coming year. The wassail bowl or cup was a large receptacle of wood, pewter, silver, or even gold filled with spiced ale or mulled wine, from which a toast was drunk, especially on Christmas Eve or Twelfth Night, to the salutation of “wes hal” (Old English, “be in health”).¹⁸⁹

The *Compact Oxford English Dictionary* says of Wassail,

• **noun 1** spiced ale or mulled wine drunk during celebrations for Twelfth Night and Christmas Eve. **2** lively festivities involving the drinking of much alcohol.

¹⁸⁹ *Encarta Encyclopedia*. “Twelfth Night”. Microsoft® Encarta® Online Encyclopedia 2007. <<http://au.encarta.msn.com>>, 1997-2007.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

• **verb 1** make merry with much alcohol. **2** go from house to house at Christmas singing carols.¹⁹⁰

On the website, History.UK.com, they discuss the very decidedly British background of Wassail:

In the earliest known days of the practice, **the wassail was poured on to the orchards after harvest as a libation or offering to bless the fields for the coming spring and to ward off evil.** Like many practices devoted to the defence against evil, wassailing has always been seen as a festive activity and has always been associated with partying and making merry. In the last couple of hundred years Wassailing has been more about good cheer and well wishing than the blessing of the crops although the practise of 'tree blessing' has seen something of a revival in rural areas. These days it is sometimes accompanied by a bonfire party and the firing of guns. Wassailing is almost always accompanied by song. "Here we come a-wassailing..." is a Christmas classic which is enjoyed by many but understood by few. (It is so misunderstood that some people sing "here we come a-carolling..." instead)...Alcohol definitely played a major part in wassail's history, but purists say it is not essential. They (somewhat unconvincingly) claim the continuance of the custom has little to do with the drink and is all about the good will and friendship that wassailing generates. Wassailing, while traditionally observed during the Christmas holiday season, is also practiced at weddings, harvest home and other such events where community and family are celebrated.¹⁹¹

This tradition definitely evolved into the practice of carolling. Many would say that this is not such a bad thing; in carolling, many of the Truths of the Gospel are shared with the world.

¹⁹⁰ *Compact Oxford English Dictionary*. "Wassail". Website; Ask Oxford.com. January 1, 2006.
<http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/wassail?view=uk>, 2006.

¹⁹¹ "Wassailing". History.UK.Com.
<<http://www.history.uk.com/christmas/index.php?archive=13>>, December 21, 2006

The Role of Music in Scripture

In the New Testament, believers are exhorted, “*And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.*”¹⁹² Paul also told believers, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”¹⁹³

As such, we know that spiritual songs, in and of themselves are encouraged, not discouraged.

We also know that there is a connection of some sort with music and prophecy. One of the major things that the Scriptures tell us with respect to music is that music often accompanied prophecies and even prophesied through their instruments.

Moreover David and the captains of the army separated for the service some of the sons of Asaph, of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who should prophesy with harps, stringed instruments, and cymbals. And the number of the skilled men performing their service was: Of the sons of Asaph: Zaccur, Joseph, Nathaniah, and Asharelah; the sons of Asaph were under the direction of Asaph, who prophesied according to the order of the king.¹⁹⁴

Prophets in the Old and New Testaments not only spoke of future events; regardless of what they were discussing in particular, they spoke ***the heart of God to the people of God***. Often, the formula went “If you... then God will ...” “If you don’t...then God will...” They needed to ensure that what they spoke was within the constraints of the Lord’s will and that they had not misspoken. Truth was the spearhead of their message, since God’s word *is* truth.

¹⁹² Ephesians 5:18-21

¹⁹³ Colossians 3: 16

¹⁹⁴ I Chronicles 25:1-2

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

Similarly, in both the Old and New Testaments, all of the faithful are admonished to ensure we do not “bear false witness.”¹⁹⁵

A false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren.¹⁹⁶

He who speaks truth declares righteousness, but a false witness, deceit.¹⁹⁷

A faithful witness does not lie, but a false witness will utter lies.¹⁹⁸

For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.¹⁹⁹

Without a doubt as believers, we are to worship the Lord, not only with words, teaching, and acts of kindness, but also with music. However, the music we worship Him with should not have scriptural errors in them.

If we, the followers of the Book who are called *as witnesses of the Truth*, are teaching some untruths about the Lord, are we not guilty of bearing false witness? If the Lord calls the bearing of false witness against another person *abominable*, how much more offensive is it to the Lord if we are doing it *in His Name*?

The Role of Christmas Carols in the Church

Within the church, often Christmas carols are sung during the Advent/Christmas season.²⁰⁰ Interspersed with biblical themes within

¹⁹⁵ See also Proverbs 19:5, 9; 21:28.

¹⁹⁶ Proverbs 6:19

¹⁹⁷ Proverbs 12:17

¹⁹⁸ Proverbs 14:5

¹⁹⁹ Matthew 15:19

CAROLLING (WASSAILING)

these songs are often half-truths and blatant untruths. As musicians (and presumably the singers/leaders), worship leaders in our churches need to ensure that whatever they present within the context of the time of musical worship is Biblical. If a leader presents unbiblical themes, statements or ideas within a song, they are, technically speaking, acting as false prophets. If we are preaching any other gospel than that which has already been preached (in the Bible), then we are guilty of being false teachers.

The Role of Christmas Carols in the World

This standard also goes for the singing of Christmas Carols in the world. Again, I would affirm that, yes, some aspects of the Gospel are shared during the singing of Christmas carols; the question to be answered though is this: “Is the Gospel clearly and ***completely*** presented in the singing of the carols?”

If the Gospel is not presented clearly, the next question one needs to ask is, does the carolling warm people up to the Gospel or does it inoculate them against the fullness of the Gospel, as it is presented in the Bible? If we, God’s Church are somehow teaching/perpetuating untruths or half-truths to the world, we are guilty of being false witnesses. Remember what Paul said, regarding people teaching things other than what was clearly laid out in Scripture as the Way to Salvation:

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. **But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone**

²⁰⁰ As an aside, if we really *do* herald Christ everyday in our lives, why do we relegate some of the more biblical songs, like “Joy to the World” to just the Christmas Season? It is just as appropriate to sing when we are giving a Gospel message of salvation. Why would we not utilize the song to its maximum potential? This song, by the way, was based on Psalm 98, which is actually a Psalm that points to the Millennial Reign of Christ, not His Incarnation.

preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ. But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.²⁰¹

Some of the Carols We Sing

With all this in mind, let's take a look at some of the things that are found in but a few of the songs we sing as the New Testament Church, in an effort to honour Jesus and "reach the world for Christ."²⁰²

"Angels We Have Heard on High"

There are three glaring mistakes in this song and a fourth smaller one.

1. First of all, while the angels may sing glory to the Lord at different times in Scripture, they did *not* sing on the night Jesus was born. In the Biblical text, we are told, "Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God **and saying**,²⁰³ "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."²⁰⁴
2. The second problem may be found in this song and the same error is repeated in a myriad of other Christmas songs.

²⁰¹ Galatians 1:6-12

²⁰² Unless otherwise specified, the texts and history of these hymns were adapted from Anderson, Douglas D. *The Hymns and Carols of Christmas*. January 1, 2006. <http://hymnsandcarolsofchristmas.com/HTML/full_index_of_hymns_and_carols.htm>. 1996-2005.

²⁰³ There is a *small* chance that it might have been singing; however, a plain reading of the text does not bear that out well. Most importantly is that the average person is not even remotely aware that the angels likely did not sing.

²⁰⁴ Luke 2:13

CAROLLING (WASSAILING)

Come to Bethlehem and see Him whose birth the
angels sing; /Come, adore on bended knee, /
Christ the Lord, the **newborn King**.

Within the text of verse 3, people are called to worship the Newborn King. While it is true that Jesus incarnated as a baby and had to grow up, et cetera, the Scriptures tell us that not *only is He no longer a baby, but He is not to be thought of as “in the flesh any longer”*; that is, he does not have corruptible flesh; he now has His glorified body, as we will have eventually.

We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.... ***For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.*** Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. ***Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer.*** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.²⁰⁵

This passage speaks of the central message of the Gospel; His death, resurrection and ascension. As believers, we ourselves have died with Him, so we are not to regard ourselves or other believers as “in the flesh”; nor are we supposed to think of Jesus as “in the flesh any longer”. He is **not** a little babe that we should adore on bended knee; He is the Conquering Ram of Revelation; He is the Alpha and the Omega; He is the Glorified Lord, who was taken in His Glorified body

²⁰⁵ II Corinthians 5:8 -11, 14-19

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

into heaven. Why would we continue to present the All Powerful Lord of the Universe as a helpless child?

The third issue is that the song belies its very Roman Catholic nature. We have already discussed the unbiblical practice of praying to/addressing saints who have gone before us. Look at this line;

See Him in a manger laid, / Whom the choirs of angels
praise; / **Mary, Joseph, lend your aid,** / While our hearts in
love we raise.

Clearly in this line, the singers are petitioning Mary and Joseph to join in the honouring of Jesus. While there is no doubt in my mind that both Mary and Joseph are in Heaven worshipping the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, they can neither hear our calls to them nor respond to us. We should *certainly* not perpetuate this non-biblical practice of praying to the saints, as the Roman Catholic Church teaches, especially in a song which we say we are worshipping the Lord of Hosts.

“Away in a Manger”

This song is a little closer to telling the Gospel Story in verse 3; in the first two lines of verse 2, however, the song speaks of things that are more romanticism of the Lord than Biblical truths:

The cattle are lowing, the poor Baby wakes. / But little Lord
Jesus, ***no crying He makes.***

While it is *possible* that Jesus did not cry if/when the animals made noise, this speculation is as accurate as the possibility that He did cry when animals made noise. Perhaps the animals did not make noise at all ... this line is nothing more than speculation, wrapped up in emotive music. It may also bestow the impression that Jesus, while a baby, never did the basic things that infants do (i.e. cry when they are startled). The danger here is that one's picture of Jesus becomes skewed; without a doubt, He is God, but He was also very much human when He incarnated.

CAROLLING (WASSAILING)

“Silent Night”

The same argument may be made about this song, as was made regarding *Away in a Manger*, but only in its most popular translation from Latin. Many of the not-so-popular versions translated the line, “Holy Night, Peaceful Night”.

Whatever the case, the version that most hear and most know starts with the line,

Silent night, Holy night/All is calm, all is bright. / Round yon
virgin, / Mother and Child. / Holy infant, so tender and mild.
Sleep in heavenly peace, / Sleep in heavenly peace.

While the night was undoubtedly holy, it was anything *but* silent. Mary and Joseph were possibly in a family dwelling, along with a multitude of their other relatives. Because others had likely come to their relatives’ house before them, the “guest chamber” (καταλυματι – *kata-loo’-ma-tee*) the only place left for them was where the family animals were also kept – in the house on the lowest level. As such, it would have likely been crowded, possibly smelly and probably at least somewhat noisy with the animals around them and the people above them on the upper level.

As for things being calm and bright around the Virgin with her Child, again, this is a dubious claim that is wholly unsubstantiated in the Word.

In verse two, we see another error, with respect to the plain teaching of the Gospel account of Jesus’ birth. This is a common error found within many of the hymns sung at this time of the year:

Silent night! Holy night! / Shepherds quake at the sight! /
Glories stream from heaven afar; / Heavenly hosts **sing** Al-
leluia! / Christ, the Savior, is born! / Christ, the Savior, is
born!

Again, this song, like “Angels We Have Heard on High”, talks about the Heavenly Host “singing” at the advent of our Lord’s birth. This is possible, but, again, the text does not make it clear. Further, all that was recorded was not the term, “Praise God” or Hallelujah. It was cer-

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

tainly a form of praise to God, but not that one. The text recounts that the Host said, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”²⁰⁶

In the third verse of this song, we have all traditionally sung,

“Radiant beams from Thy Holy face/ With the dawn of re-deeming grace”.

While it is true that Jesus is the Light of the World, the Scriptures tell us that there was *nothing* that was unique about our Saviour, when it came to the way He appeared to men. Isaiah 53:2 tells us of the Saviour’s looks,

For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, **There is no beauty that we should desire Him.**

Some would say that the poet was just taking license with the subject; this is precisely my point. While it is alright to discuss Jesus as the Light of the World, we should not portray Him in such a way that the world will be given the impression that He was amazingly good looking or was so radiant that people “knew” He was the Saviour of the World, simply by looking at Him. Why not? Because this goes in opposition to the plain Word of God. Whenever our songs teach anything in opposition with the True Word of God, we have definitely crossed over from being bearers of the Gospel to being bearers of another “Gospel”, which is no Gospel at all.

“Hark the Herald Angels Sing”

What about this song? Besides the obvious (singing angels again), the original song did not have anything to do with angels singing. In its original version, Charles Wesley penned *these* first two lines,

Hark, how all the welkin²⁰⁷ rings, / “Glory to the King of kings²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

CAROLLING (WASSAILING)

In the original version, we hear of the sky/heaven²⁰⁹ being full of the praises regarding the Glory of the King of Kings, upon whom the rest of the song's glories are conferred.

One of the major problems I personally see with the decided slant toward the celebration of the birth of Christ, as opposed to the death, burial, resurrection and subsequent ascension of our Lord, is that it gives the world a false impression of our Lord and Saviour.²¹⁰

“O Come Emmanuel”

This song is a mixed bag. The first two verses talk of the historical (and Biblical) Jewish expectation of the Lord and are certainly biblical in their theme. The third verse, however, has some problems:

O Come, thou Lord of David's Key / The royal door fling
wide and free; / Safeguard for us the heavenward road, /
And bar the way to death's abode.

In this third verse, Jesus is called, “Thou Lord of David's Key”. This is erroneous. In Scripture, the Messiah is not the one who *is* the Key, but the One who holds the Key.

Listen to these verses:

The key of the house of David **I will lay on his shoulder;**
So he shall open, and no one shall shut; And he shall

²⁰⁷ Welkin - The word comes from the Old English *wolcen*, a cloud, the sky or under heaven.

²⁰⁸ Wesley, Charles. “Hark, How All the Welkin Rings”. *The Hymns and Carols of Christmas*. January 1, 2006. Douglas D. Anderson. <http://hymnsandcarolsofchristmas.com/Hymns_and_Carols/hark_how_all_the_welkin_rings.htm>. 1996-2005.

²⁰⁹ *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, Fourth Edition. “Welkin”. Houghton Mifflin Company. 2004.

²¹⁰ I will explain what I mean more fully after this section.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

shut, and no one shall open. I will fasten him as a peg in a secure place, And he will become a glorious throne to his father's house.²¹¹

The key of the house of David is *conferred upon Him*; He himself is not the key.

"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, These things says He who is holy, He who is true, "**He who has the key of David**, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens"²¹²

In case anyone was unsure the Isaiah passage actually said he was the **Holder** of the key, rather than the Key itself, the book of Revelation made it clear that He is the One that **has** the key.

The other major problem with this verse is that it gives the impression that the road to heaven is paved with acts. While there is no doubt that our response to **being** saved is obedience, our salvation has been secured by Jesus' blood, not our good works. This verse intimates a very works-based religion, rather than a faith/grace based salvation, as found in the pages of the Scriptures.

"The Holly and the Ivy"

This song was already alluded to earlier in this book, during the discussion on *Holly and Ivy*. There is little doubt that its history is in paganism. The male element, the Holly, is represented by Jesus and the Ivy, the feminine, is represented by Mary. Both the opening and the closing of the song have more than small remnants of the paganistic dichotomy found in their matching of these plants in their belief system. This is a clear example of Roman Christianity trying to "baptize" pagan elements as their own.

The holly and the ivy, /When they are both full grown, /Of all trees that are in the wood, /The holly bears the crown

O, the rising of the sun, /And the running of the deer /The playing of the merry organ, /Sweet singing in the choir.

²¹¹ Isaiah 22:22-23

²¹² Revelation 3:7

CAROLLING (WASSAILING)

The holly bears a prickle, /As sharp as any thorn, /**And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ, /On Christmas Day in the morn.**

The holly and the ivy, /When they are both full grown, /Of all trees that are in the wood, /The holly bears the crown

The fingerprints of its origin are all over the last verse: “The holly and the ivy, /When they are both full grown, /Of all trees that are in the wood, /The holly bears the crown”. Notwithstanding this part of the song, it teaches an interesting ‘Christmas-ism’, “And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ, /**On Christmas Day in the morn**”.

Not only is the purported *day* of His birth announced in this song, but the actual time of day – in the morning. It is of interest that the Bible doesn’t actually mention his time of birth, but does say that the angels appeared in the fields at *night*. While that does not necessarily mean He was born at night, it is a more likely consideration than the morning. Further, according to the song, Jesus was born on Christmas day – December 25th. (It is fair to assume that the writers of this song meant that He was born on December 25th, since most of Christendom had been celebrating Christmas on that day for well over 1400 years and the name was conferred upon the day long after it had been adopted.)

Many Other Songs with Errors in Them

Just off the top of my head, I can think of at least another five songs that have glaring errors in them.

1. “Go Tell It On the Mountain” declares that Jesus was born on Christmas *and* in the Morning.
2. “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen” tells us that “Jesus Christ, Our Saviour was born on Christmas Day”. It also says in verse four, “This holy tide of Christmas all others doth deface”. This line presupposes that Christmas is biblical, holy and set apart for God. Only if these things were true, could someone “deface” Christmas.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

3. “O Come All Ye Faithful” – this hymn was introduced into Protestantism by an Anglican minister, who later abandoned the Protestant movement to join the Roman Catholic Church. There are a couple of issues here; verse 1 calls Him the King of Angels and verse three says He was “born this happy morning”. While Jesus is certainly the King of the Jews, the title, King of Angels, is not biblical, nor is the idea that he was born in the morning.
4. “O Little Town of Bethlehem” – while this song has elements of the Gospel in it, such as receiving Christ in our hearts, one of the verses talks of Jesus being “born in us”. Scripture says that when the Spirit of God comes into us, *we* are born again; Jesus is not reborn in us. Again, throughout this song, as with others, Jesus is spoken of as a Child, not of as the Risen Saviour of the world.
5. “What Child is This” – again, speaks not of the historical aspect of Christ once being a baby, but speaks of Him in the present tense as being a baby. This song has many falsehoods sewn into its musical coat.

First of all, we have angels singing and shepherds guarding the baby. The text of the song also heralds him as the Son of Mary. While this is technically true, Scripture, when referring to His earthly heritage, was more likely to refer to Him as the Son of the Carpenter, Joseph. Further, Scripture tends to call Him Son of Man and Son of God, not Son of Mary. This, again, belies the Roman Catholic dogma placed within the lines of the text.

Another idea that gives me pause is found within verse two of the hymn:

Why lies He in such mean estate, Where ox and
ass are feeding? **Good Christian, fear; for sin-**
ners here The silent Word is pleading.

Here again, the assertion of the “silent word” is speaking. Perhaps this is a cryptic reference to Jesus’ fulfillment of the

CAROLLING (WASSAILING)

prophecies that mention that in front of his accusers, He remains silent. However, in this song, He is being spoken of as a baby, not the adult Christ. He made a way for us, and desires that none should perish, but He does not *plead* with man, either through His words in the Bible, through the Christ Child, or through the song. He gives the invitation and a warning against not accepting that invitation, but He does not beg us to believe in Him.

6. "We Three Kings" – although this song has some interesting elements in it, there are some pretty glaring errors too, not the least of which is that Scripture neither mentioned the number of people who came from the East nor that they were kings. It also gives the impression that the Magi came to Jesus while He was still in the manger. He was not; they had by this time, settled in a home in Bethlehem. Given that Herod gave an edict to kill all of the male children from two years old under, the probability of Jesus being an infant was slim to none. He was, by that time, a small child. Listen to the text:

Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young **Child**, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also." When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And when **they had come into the house, they saw the young Child** with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.... Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

which he had determined from the wise men.²¹³

It is obvious that the number of “kings” was surmised by the number of gifts these worshippers brought to the child.

7. The Drummer Boy – nothing in this particular carol is true – it is a fanciful piece of poetry, but I am personally unsure how this illustrates life as a believer.

I would like to highlight the fact that it would appear, at least from many of these songs that we (Christians) are certain that He was born on December 25th. There are many, many more issues with carols we sing each year in our churches and on the streets of the world, in an effort to “reach them for Christ”.

²¹³ Matthew 2:7 -11, 16

12

Chapter 12: What is the “Gospel” Presented by Christmas?

One of the most compelling reasons people use to continue to celebrate Christmas is the belief that the Gospel of the Kingdom is preached to the world.²¹⁴

As we have seen so far in this book, most of the elements found within the celebration of the feast day known as Christmas are certainly not biblical. From the general perception, what is the message that is preached to the world?

If one were to listen to the average person in the world, they *might* know about “Mary and the Baby Jesus”²¹⁵ in the manger, the “Three

²¹⁴ I will lay out the Gospel later on in the book in the section entitled, *What is the Gospel of Christ, According to the Bible?*

²¹⁵ It is of interest to me that the World is willing to accept not only Mother Mary and the Baby Jesus, but because of this constant image portrayed to non-believers and nominal believers, they are more easily deceived by such things as the myriads of apparitions of the Virgin Mary holding the “baby Jesus.” People who are grounded in the Word of God are more than peripherally aware that Jesus is no longer to be regarded as “in the flesh”, as He is now glorified. Listen:

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

Kings of the Orient”, who came to visit Him “in the manger”, baby Jesus’ “dad”, Joseph,²¹⁶ the “fact” that He was born on Christmas Day, that He came to bring “peace on earth, and goodwill to all men”,²¹⁷ and that we get to exchange gifts on this day, in order to honour this baby King who is poor and treated badly. Somehow, Santa Claus, the Christmas tree, holly, ivy, mistletoe, yule logs, wassailing, and all sorts of other things are mixed in there, but few know (or care to know) about the purported significance of these elements. Many who

For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. **Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer.** — II Corinthians 5:14-16

When this “Virgin Mother” comes proclaiming that through her and her alone, can one gain access to Christ, and ultimately to God, there is a problem. Nevertheless, millions upon millions of people have fallen for this lie; some Evangelicals have even begun to be swayed by such “great signs and lying wonders”. This is, at least in part, due to the consistent portrayal of our Risen Lord as a helpless babe either lying in a manger or being cuddled by His mother. For those who are interested in seeing the breadth of the deception being proffered by these apparitions and their “babies”, please feel free to view the online version of the video, “Messages from Heaven”

< <http://creationists.org/MessagesFromHeaven/english.html>>.

²¹⁶ Scripture very clearly states about Jesus’ Father, “And the angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born *will be called the Son of God.*”

²¹⁷ This is the false “Gospel” of Universalism and Inclusivism. When the world hears this, they are not hearing the calls to righteousness that are required; Jesus’ peace will come to men only when they choose Him. It is of interest that most of the original texts actually read something like:

“Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men **upon whom God’s favour rests!**” – Luke 2:14

WHAT IS THE “GOSPEL” PRESENTED BY CHRISTMAS?

are aware of the pagan background of these elements, find that these things further confuse the issue. Occasionally, a clear Gospel message can be wrangled out of this mess, but we have definitely convoluted the plain reading of the central message of the Gospel with a bunch of stuff that doesn't belong.

It's not a small wonder that *anyone* has been saved during this time of year; new believers (and not-so-new believers) have quite a job of trying to separate out the fables, the fantasy, and the fluff from the truth, once they are saved. The only reason *anyone could possibly* choose God in the midst of all of this non-truth is due to God Himself.

There are certainly elements of the Truth presented in the midst of the muddle of this patchwork celebration; the Christmas season seems to afford opportunity to minister. However, choosing as a Christian *not* to celebrate it will undoubtedly open more doors to evangelism than celebrating it, as a brother in the Lord testified to last year just after Christmas.

In our small group, as we begin our time together, it is customary for us to share with the rest of the people what has gone on for the past week or so. Because we had just completed the holidays, this was the first time we had been together since before the season. This brother in the Lord had decided just before Christmas that, although there were many within our church who were partaking, he and his family were chose not to celebrate Jesus' birth at this time of year because of all of the non-biblical elements that are mixed in with the truth. In recounting the time since that decision, he told us about the dozens of opportunities to speak with other people about the Lord's True Gospel precisely because he chose *not* to celebrate. At work and even in a line-up for the bank, he was able to share with people, partially because they were really curious.

Regardless of their religious bend, almost invariably, the first question they would ask of him was if he was a Jehovah's Witness. They became intrigued when he stated to each of them that he was a born-again believer. In the ensuing conversations, he was able to outline

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

the message of the Gospel as laid out in Scripture (to varying degrees, based on time).

He recounted the many experiences he had:

What I found interesting about it was the response was the same from believers and unbelievers alike – word for word. “You know, that’s great for you, but I like Christmas”. The other big one was “It’s not about the history, it’s what it means to you individually as a person.”²¹⁸

I must say it is baffling that people, especially God’s people, would just dismiss the truth because of their traditions.

Just Because God Can Use Something Doesn’t Mean We Should Do It

Some try to say that it doesn’t really matter *what* we do; as long as we are sincere and we are trying to reach the lost. How God chooses to utilize the stupidity of mankind should be of little concern to us; *our job* is to be obedient μαρτυρεω (*mar-too-ré’-oh*)- witnesses - of the Truth. The fact that God *can* use Christmas doesn’t mean that He necessarily blesses or condones it. Also, as mentioned earlier, if we are speaking untruths about anything written in the Bible, we are guilty of being false witnesses. It is one thing to do so out of ignorance, but another thing entirely to perpetuate false teachings with full knowledge.

If one were to take a look at the clear message of the Bible, in fact, we would be *more* careful about what we are doing, not less. Freedom in Christ does not give us freedom to just ignore those things He has already revealed in His word.

Before we get into what God’s word has to say about all of this, I would like to quote a practicing pagan about the celebration of Christmas. Listen to this,

Our Christian friends are often quite surprised at how enthusi-

²¹⁸ Based on a series of conversations with a fellow believer, Dwayne Mayer in January 2007.

WHAT IS THE “GOSPEL” PRESENTED BY CHRISTMAS?

astically we Pagans celebrate the 'Christmas' season. Even though we prefer to use the word 'Yule', and our celebrations may peak a few days BEFORE the 25th, we nonetheless follow many of the traditional customs of the season: decorated trees, carolling, presents, Yule logs, and mistletoe. We might even go so far as putting up a 'Nativity set', though for us the three central characters are likely to be interpreted as Mother Nature, Father Time, and the Baby Sun-God. None of this will come as a surprise to anyone who knows the true history of the holiday, of course.²¹⁹

²¹⁹ Nichols, Mike. *Cheiron Hellenic Pagan Site*. “Midwinter Night's Eve: Yule”. January 1, 2006. <http://www.geocities.com/athens/parthenon/6670/doc/t_hlds.html>. MicroMuse Press, Updated on January 18, 2000.

SECTION III

WHAT DOES GOD HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THIS?

Throughout this book so far, we have investigated the things surrounding the celebration of Christmas. We have heard the origin of the name of the celebration and its implications, we have learned the likely date of the birth of Christ, and we have looked at the elements of Christmas. Portions of Scripture have been brought in to clarify the issues mentioned so far, too. Now, I would like to specifically discuss what the Lord has to say about the act of taking the holy things of God and mixing them with things/acts that are not considered holy.

13

Chapter 13: Who is God?

I would like to first reiterate that I believe there is One True God who exists in Three Persons; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These Three are co-equal and co-eternal. This is a big assertion; one that I will not delve deeply into in this book. However, if anyone would like to know more about why I believe in the One God who is Three Persons and how I can reconcile these thoughts with the Scriptures, I would be happy to delineate the theology for them. As I have already mentioned before, please contact me with your questions.²²⁰

His Nature Never Changes

It is difficult for us to comprehend, but God's nature doesn't change; He cannot/will not say anything – a new revelation or teaching – that totally disagrees with that which He has already decreed. For example, we can know for certain that there is only One True God because He has decreed that in the Bible. We can also know that Jesus is, in fact, God, based on the things He said ***and*** based on the passages that pointed to Him from the Old Testament.

²²⁰ You can contact me by email at bill.rosanna@shaw.ca or through my distributor, Lulu.com. Make sure you indicate the name of the book and my name.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

He is the same, no matter what. Listen to the Word of God:

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.²²¹

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, **with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.**²²²

For those who think this is only a New Testament idea, listen to these passages:

They will perish, but You will endure; Yes, they will all grow old like a garment; Like a cloak You will change them, And they will be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will have no end.²²³

For I am the LORD, I do not change.²²⁴

It is of interest that even though we often quote these passages about God *not* changing, somehow, we seem to think that He *does* change His mind.

He is Holy

Scripture makes it clear that our God is a Holy God. What does that even mean, though? Most Christians spout the phrase off without thinking about the implications.

According to the *Online Bible Greek Lexicon*, the word Holy (αγιος - ha'-gee-ōs) comes from:

αγιος (an awful thing) Holy, characteristic of God, separated to God, worthy of veneration

1) Its highest application is to God himself, in his purity, majesty and glory. {#Lu 1:49 Joh 17:11 Re 4:8}

²²¹ Hebrews 13:8

²²² James 1:17

²²³ Psalm 102:26 – 27

²²⁴ Malachi 3:6a

WHO IS GOD?

- 1a) Of things and places which have a claim to reverence as sacred to God, e.g. the Temple: {#Mt 24:15 Heb 9:1}
- 1b) Of persons employed by him, as angels: {#1Th 3:13 marg.} prophets, {#Lu 1:70} apostles, {#Eph 3:5}
- 2) Applied to persons as separated to God's service:
 - 2a) Of Christ: {#Mr 1:24 Ac 4:30}
 - 2b) Of Christians: {#Ac 9:13 Ro 1:7 Heb 6:10 Re 5:8}
- 3) In the moral sense of sharing God's purity: {#Mr 6:20 Joh 17:11 Ac 3:14 Re 3:7}
- 4) Of pure, clean sacrifices and offerings: {#1Co 7:14 Eph 1:4}²²⁵

If He is holy then He is not to be approached if we have any kind of stain on us. If He is holy, then we also are to be holy, according to the word.²²⁶ We are to be set apart for Him and Him alone. There is no room in the life of a Christian for traditions that include lies, heresy and misinformation. These are not the tools of God; they are the playground of the enemy.

He is Jealous

We are also told time and again that God is jealous of our worship. Because He is the God of the Universe; He does not like us to turn our worship to any other, whether we do it on purpose or not.

Idolatry Provokes Him to Jealousy

"You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. **For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God**, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments."²²⁷

"Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the

²²⁵ *Online Greek Lexicon*. "Holy" Online Bible. Vancouver, BC: Timnath-serah Inc., 1995-2001.

²²⁶ Leviticus 11:44; I Peter 1:16

²²⁷ Exodus 20:3-6 (compare Deuteronomy 5:7-10)

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst. But you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images '(for you shall worship no other god, **for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God**), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods, and one of them invites you and you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters play the harlot with their gods and make your sons play the harlot with their gods.²²⁸

"Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which the LORD your God has forbidden you. **For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.**"²²⁹

"You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are all around you (for the LORD your God is a jealous God among you), lest the anger of the LORD your God be aroused against you and destroy you from the face of the earth."²³⁰

James tells us that the Holy Spirit is jealous, as well:

Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, **"The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"**? But He gives more grace. Therefore He says:

"God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.²³¹

²²⁸ Exodus 34:12-16

²²⁹ Deuteronomy 4:23, 24

²³⁰ Deuteronomy 6:14, 15

²³¹ James 4:5-8

14

Chapter 14: What About Salvation and Grace?

What is the Gospel of Christ, According to the Bible?

Few born-again believers, whether Protestant, Evangelical, or Fundamentalist would disagree with me when I say that the essence of the Gospel is comprised of the following things.

Man is a Sinner

Many in our culture are preoccupied with the erroneous idea that humanity is basically good. “The problem with people in the world”, they would say, “is that they suffer from a lack of ‘self-esteem’.”

This lie of trying to elevate “self” is the same one that resulted in Eve, and then Adam choosing to disobey God. Instead of listening to that which God said about limits, they thought they could improve on what God created by investing in “self”. Listen: God first told Adam that he could eat of any tree he wanted – with the exception of a single tree. He was told if he was to eat of it, he would surely die.

Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."²³²

This man and his wife, Eve, literally only had *one* command to follow – they were free to eat what they chose and go wherever they desired, with the exception of this fruit from a single tree in the entire garden. Things went along well, until...

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.²³³

You will notice that Eve responded to a couple of things; first, she chose to believe the Serpent over the clear word of God. She knew what the directions were, but because she thought the Serpent was telling the truth and God was not, she chose to do that which God expressly commanded against.

It would seem that at least in part, the motivation is “self-improvement” and elevation of status; instead of having to rely on

²³² Genesis 2:15-17

²³³ Genesis 3:1-7

WHAT ABOUT SALVATION AND GRACE?

God's wisdom, the promise to be able to "be like God knowing good and evil" tweaked her pride. She had the capability to choose right then, instead, she chose to sin. Adam followed after her.

These acts of rebellion resulted in the entire human race being born into a state of sinfulness.

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned-(For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law). Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.²³⁴

The Soul that Sins Shall Die

No matter how rich we are, how smart we are, how much money we think we can make, what the colour of our skin happens to be, or which continent we are born on, we are all on an even playing field when it comes to the cost of falling short of that which God has for us. The cost of sin is death. It only takes one – in our entire lifetime – to be considered unworthy to be in the presence of God.

"Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; The soul who sins shall die."²³⁵

This death is not only a physical one; the fact is, if one dies in a state where they have not dealt with their sins through Jesus' cleansing blood, they will remain separated from God for eternity.

Man is Desperately Wicked and Needs to be Saved from His Sins, as He Cannot Save Himself

From that time on, we humans have retained this sinful nature. Scripture tells us that, contrary to the popular teaching of our culture, we are

²³⁴ Romans 5:12-14

²³⁵ Ezekiel 18:4

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

not good; there is not even *one* person on this planet who has not sinned ...

As it is written: "**There is none righteous, no, not one;** There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; **There is none who does good, no, not one....** for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.²³⁶

... with the notable exception of Jesus Himself, of course.²³⁷

Not only are we "not good" in our natures, but every human being is *personally* guilty; we are not being punished for the sin of Adam. Each human being has *chosen* to rebel against the commandments of God at least one time in their lives.

Lots of people think that if they live basically a good life, that is good enough. They believe that God will weigh the good and the bad and at the end, because they have "done more good than bad", God will let them into Heaven. This is not the message of the Bible, though.

Before we can be freed from the burden of sin, we need to first recognise and admit that our hearts truly deceitful in and of themselves; ***nothing we can do on our own will make our sinful natures go away.*** No matter how hard we try apart from God through Jesus, the best, we can do is *just not good enough*.

We are told in Isaiah,

You meet him who rejoices and does righteousness, who remembers You in Your ways. You are indeed angry, or we

²³⁶ Romans 3:10-12, 23

²³⁷ Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, **but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.** Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. – Hebrews 4:15

WHAT ABOUT SALVATION AND GRACE?

have sinned-In these ways we continue; And **we need to be saved**. But **we are all** like an unclean thing, **and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags**; we all fade as a leaf, and **our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away**. And there is no one who calls on Your name, who stirs himself up to take hold of You; for You have hidden your face from us, and have consumed us because of our iniquities.²³⁸

God is Love

God created us and desires relationship with us. In the beginning, in the Garden of Eden, it appears that He used to walk with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day in the Garden. Once they (Adam and Eve) disobeyed God, this good thing was much less fun for them:

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?" So he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself."²³⁹

He delights in His creation. However, while He is a Loving God, He is also a Just God and a Holy God; sin cannot remain His presence. It separates us from Him. As such, if we have sinned even **one** time in our entire lifetime, we are not able to come into His presence without dealing with the sin. The hard part about this for humanity is that while God has made provision for sin, we think we can do things our way.

We like to try to justify ourselves; it seems to be in our nature to "want to make amends". Whenever I have hurt someone's feelings, for example, I tend to go out of my way to try to "make it better". The caricature of husbands buying their wives flowers to smooth things over after they have said or done something wrong is a really good example.

²³⁸ Isaiah 64:5-7

²³⁹ Genesis 3:8-10

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

What we fail to realize is that our sin has caused a huge rift between us and God. While we may try to use good works, such as kindness to others, philanthropy, good behaviour, try to keep the commandments, et cetera, the reality is that one sin is all it takes to make a chasm between God and us that is *un-crossable* – by anything, that is, but the Cross of Christ and the sacrifice it represents.

Innumerable people cry “foul” when they hear this. They reply to these assertions with things like “My God loves me for who I am” “He is just; He knows my heart”.

The fact is, while God *is* a God of Love, He is also a God of justice.

If you were driving down the road and went through a stop light, the chances are, you will likely receive a ticket for your trouble. If you were to try to get out of it by telling the officer that you stopped at the stoplight the last 99 times, it is unlikely he will relent; regardless of your past history, you have broken the law and deserve the full punishment, as outlined in the law books.

This transgression of the law needs to be paid; in this case, it could be paid with either cash to the city or if you do not have enough money to be able to pay it, community service is often an alternative. Should you choose *not* to pay this ticket that you get for transgressing the law of the city, a warrant for your arrest might be issued; at the very least, the next time you tried to update your registration, this ticket would come up and you would have to pay for it before you were able to update your registration and license plate.

Similarly, God said that the soul that sins shall die – period. He also said in his Word that without the shedding of blood, there can be no remission (payment) for sin.²⁴⁰

²⁴⁰ Hebrews 9:22. Please compare this with Exodus 30:10; Leviticus 4:25, 34; 5:9; 6:30; 16:3, 15, 27; II Chronicles 29:24; Ephesians 2:13; Hebrews 10:19; 12:24; 13:12; I Peter 1:2; Revelation 1:5 and especially

“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, **and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.**” - 1 John 1:7

WHAT ABOUT SALVATION AND GRACE?

So here is the quandary; God loves us and wants relationship with us. Each and every one of us has sinned, though, and that sin separates us from God. Until the cost of the penalty is paid for, as much as we would like to be in relationship with God, God is just and needs to have the penalty paid. Thankfully, He has made provision for just such circumstances – Jesus’ sacrifice on the Cross.²⁴¹

Jesus is the Way

This provision is not always well-received, primarily because people want to do things their own way. The people in the world often become offended when we express that Scripture tells us the only way to God the Father is *through Jesus Christ, His Son*.²⁴² (Because of the pressure in our society, recently, some evangelical Christians have begun to soft-sell the Gospel.)

What does that mean, though? In essence, Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross made provision for our sins. When we choose to accept that provision, as well as the covenant that goes along with it (obedience to Him, following Him, et cetera), we can be saved.

²⁴¹ In the Old Testament, He illustrated the coming Messiah’s sacrifice through the sacrificial system. Many have a problem with the entire sacrificial system thing; some think it was needless and did nothing other than result in the death of countless innocent animals. In “Appendix C”, I have included a bit of an explanation about the reason for the sacrifices in the Old Testament and their connection with the New Covenant.

²⁴² Who, as I mentioned before, is not just a “good man”, but literally was “God in the flesh.” He is now in heaven; He existed before He came to earth and he exists now, since he returned to Heaven. He has always and always will exist because he is eternal, Omnipotent, Omniscient, and Omnipresent. Should anyone like more information on who Jesus said he was, please e-mail me at bill.rosanna@shaw.ca; I would be glad to give a clear outline of what He said about Himself in the Scriptures – I could also send information about what the Scriptures in the Old Testament said about him, should you like that as well.

The Focus of Our Preaching Should Be the Cross, not the Crèche²⁴³

Did you know that only two of the four Gospels mention Jesus' birth? Did you know that the rest of the New Testament doesn't even make mention of it? The central message of the New Testament Gospel is the Cross of Christ! **His death, burial and resurrection**, not His birth, should be the central focus.

And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. for ***I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.*** I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.²⁴⁴

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the **gospel**, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. For ***the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*** For it is written:

*"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."*

Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, ***it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.*** For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but ***we preach Christ crucified***, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, ***but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.***²⁴⁵

²⁴³ This is another word for the "nativity scene" associated with Christmas. The central focus is Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus in the manger.

²⁴⁴ I Corinthians 2:1, 4-5

²⁴⁵ I Corinthians 1:17-25

WHAT ABOUT SALVATION AND GRACE?

Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. **And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.** Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up-if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. **If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.** But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.²⁴⁶

Paul and others throughout the millennia have suffered, not for the proclamation of His birth, but the proclamation of His shed blood on the Cross.

As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these would compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. But God forbid that I should **boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.** For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.²⁴⁷

For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame-who set their mind on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

²⁴⁶ I Corinthians 15:12-23

²⁴⁷ Galatians 6:12-15

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.²⁴⁸

Have you noticed that the World loves Christmas but doesn't like the message of the Cross? This is because the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. *We as believers ought to pay at least as much attention to His death, burial and resurrection as we seem to pay to His birth.*

True for You, but Not True for Me?

In our multicultural society, everyone's beliefs are supposed to be dealt with in the same manner. If our country's overtures are to be believed, every faith is of equal value. I suppose this is understandable; for the most part, our country is in darkness to the Way the Truth and the Life, Jesus Christ.

What has amazed me is that I have even heard *Evangelical Christians* spout such nonsense as, "Jesus is the way – for me. You may have a different way to have a relationship with God, but I choose Jesus. Ultimately, all paths lead to God anyway."

Jesus himself said this:

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him."²⁴⁹

This teaching can also be found in other parts of the Bible:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, be-

²⁴⁸ Philippians 3:18-21

²⁴⁹ John 14:6, 7

WHAT ABOUT SALVATION AND GRACE?

cause he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.²⁵⁰

As much as we would like to be politically-correct and careful about other people's feelings, it is a lot less rude and cruel to tell people the truth and risk having them offended here on earth *before* they die, than having them be offended – and lost for eternity – on the other side of their last breath.

Faith is the Key

Throughout the centuries, many have acknowledged that this is undoubtedly the truth; however, intellectual assent is not apprehension of the truth. We must not only agree with the concept, but accept it *and respond to it in faith*.²⁵¹ Faith is essentially belief plus action; just

²⁵⁰ John 3:16-21

²⁵¹ There are many within Christendom who believe that there is no choice whatsoever by the person who might believe; instead, they say that it is completely up to God (the people who think this is true are often called Hyper-Calvinists). On the other side of the fence are those who say that God is a total Gentleman and would never “force” people into believing (often, the term associated with this stance is known as Arminianism). Scripture has passages that would support both sides of the argument. Let me illustrate:

There is little doubt that there is some kind of choice involved in salvation:

And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." – Joshua 24:15

But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

because I believe something to be true doesn't mean that I have faith in it. James illustrates the concept.

You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe-and tremble!²⁵²

Faith is not simply a nebulous feeling that gives you "warm fuzzies." It is true that acting upon faith is a scary thing. Scripture tells us that in order to be saved from the wretched self that we have dwelling inside of us, the self that is full of sin, we must respond in faith to the gift that the Father extended to humankind through Jesus' sacrifice on

preach); that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." – Romans 10:8-13

There are other passages that show that God has the initiative:

No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. – John 6:44

You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another. If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. – John 15:16-19

As such, I would consider myself a "Calminian" (*grin*). I believe that we both have choice *and* that choice cannot be made until God makes provision for it. I also think that choice is not exactly that which we in popular thought believe "choice" to be.

²⁵² James 2:19

WHAT ABOUT SALVATION AND GRACE?

the cross. We need to let the Lord “apply” the blood of Jesus onto the doorposts of our hearts, so that when God sees us, instead of looking at our righteousness (which, as Isaiah already illustrated, is as filthy rags), He sees the pure, unblemished righteousness of Jesus.

Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.²⁵³

Faith?

When recounting the great men and women of faith from the Old Testament, the Book of Hebrews reminds us “*but without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*”²⁵⁴ Both the Old and the New Testaments teach us that we are saved by the Grace of God; we did not deserve to be saved. Adam and Eve deserved to die on the spot, as did Cain, and you and I for that matter. Nevertheless, God desired that we be saved. Our response to Him is the issue that we are dealing with. That response is to be faith and love.

Love?

The motivation for following God in the Old Testament sounds like it came from the pages of the New Testament; in fact, Jesus’ mention of loving God with our hearts, minds, souls, and strength comes from the Old Testament.

In Deuteronomy 6:4, 5, the people are told, “*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*” It is of interest that this passage on loving God follows the giving of the 10

²⁵³ Romans 3:24-26

²⁵⁴ Hebrews 11:6

commandments; clearly, the motivation for following the commands of God in the Old Testament is *love*.

Love equals Obedience?

Once we have been saved, believers are called to lead a holy, separate life from the former life of wickedness. We must utterly repent (μετανοια - metanoia – that is, turn 180 degrees; turn entirely away from) our old wicked behaviours and habits, in order to go a new way with the Lord.

New Testament believers are told by Jesus that if we loved Him, **we would obey His commands.**²⁵⁵ This is the badge by which we are seen to be His believers. That rings of the commands mentioned already from the Old Testament.

We must place our own agendas and all that is from us in subjection to the entire Word of God. If we love Him, we will obey Him. I have already mentioned Paul's treatise on the fact that we are now to be slaves of righteousness.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁵ **"If you love Me, keep My commandments...** "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him."— John 14:15, 21

"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. — John 15:10

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.— I John 5:2-3

This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it. - II John 1:6

²⁵⁶ See the section on *The New Testament Church and the World* for the full text of this passage.

WHAT ABOUT SALVATION AND GRACE?

The concern I personally have with respect to the keeping of Christmas, is about how we need to remember to approach a Holy God. Is God still the same²⁵⁷ or has He changed His mind about these things? In order to truly love Him, we need to approach Him on His terms, not our own. This is the essence of love toward Him, if He is consulted on the matter, at least.

Where Does Grace Come In?

Believe it or not, the celebration of Christmas is *not an issue of salvation*. Why? Because salvation in both the Old and New Testaments came through God's grace alone, not through the keeping of the Law.

This will probably shock many people, Fundamentalists, Evangelicals, Protestants, and skeptics alike, but the fact is God has *never* saved people **through the keeping of the Law**. In reality, Grace is an Old Testament idea. God redeemed Israel from Egypt *before* He gave them the commands. Exodus 19:6-9 shows us this:

Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen **what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.** Although the whole earth is mine, **you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.**' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

We are also told in Ezekiel of the salvation mentioned in the New Testament:

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you **and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.**²⁵⁸

We also know from the Hebrews chapter 11 that it was by faith Abra-

²⁵⁷ See the section on the *Nature of God*.

²⁵⁸ Ezekiel 36:26, 27

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

ham and his contemporaries were accepted, not by the keeping of the Law. Their choice to keep the law was by faith and with the heart of love, the desire to do what it is that God wants from His people.

The concept, “if this is who we are, how then shall we live” came from the **Old Testament**, the only Bible Paul and the people from the First Century had. When searching the scriptures to see if these things were so, the Bereans looked to the **Old Testament**, not the New, since the New was still being formed.

Salvation was the Only Plan God ever had; He did not have another. The Old Testament saints looked *forward* to the Christ in faith; we look *back* at the Sacrifice of Christ in faith. Either way, the Sacrifice of Christ was enough for all at all times. Nevertheless, as we read very clearly in Ezekiel and in Exodus, once God saves us, He expects us to keep His commandments, which, as we have already read, “are not burdensome”.²⁵⁹

The commandments have *never* been able to bring salvation to people in and of themselves; the fact is that God has *always* brought salvation by His Grace.²⁶⁰ He has always told us that if we are His, however, we need to listen to what He says. We are told in the book of Ezekiel that the reason for the giving of the Holy Spirit to His people. Listen to His promise

“I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.”²⁶¹

²⁵⁹ I John 5:1-4

²⁶⁰ Grace is the unmerited favour of God. He forgives us, even though we do not deserve it. Through Jesus, the Father has made a way for us to come into His holy presence. There is nothing we could have done to gain this favour; He has done this independently of us.

²⁶¹ Ezekiel 36:37. Clearly, only those who are born-again are able to keep His commandments (through the power of the Holy Spirit, of course). If we consistently break His commands and only give Him lip service, we need to check to see if we really are one of His children.

15

Chapter 15: Commands of God

Even though my salvation doesn't depend on it, I am *not* free to commit adultery, steal, lie, or murder. The Commandments are still valid – and even more so since Christ, since He spoke of fulfilling (not invalidating) them:

“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”²⁶²

When we think about the three commands Jesus gave, they comprise everything else:

*“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength”,*²⁶³ and *love your neighbour as yourself”*²⁶⁴ and *“Love one*

²⁶² Matthew 5:17 – 20

²⁶³ Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27; compare the Old Testament Deuteronomy 6:4.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

another as I have loved you". If we love the Lord, we will not disdain what He says.

In essence, God has only *one* plan to salvation. In both Old and New Testaments, God *has* always and *will* always save people by grace alone and through faith alone; He has never saved anyone through their works. Both works and the keeping of the Law, according to the entire Bible were always **the result of a relationship with God**, and never a means toward obtaining that relationship.

When Christians say things like "this is not an issue of salvation", they are really saying that they have the freedom to do something because they are saved by grace, yet these same Christians would be deeply offended if another believer chose to commit adultery or murder, and then say "this is not an issue of salvation".

While in all cases, these statements are true, nevertheless, the keeping of the commandments are a non-negotiable issue for believers of the Book. We **do not** keep the commandments in order to merit salvation, but we are to keep them **because** we have been granted salvation. As such, we should stop all of the posturing and just take a look at what the word actually says. Just because this is not an issue of salvation doesn't mean we should not take it seriously. The converse is opposite.

How Does God View the Mixing of the Holy and the Profane?²⁶⁵

²⁶⁴ Compare with Leviticus 19:18: 'You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

²⁶⁵ According to Strong's Concordance, the word profane has many meanings, depending on the ending and depending on the context. Here are the main ideas: כָּלָל *chalal khaw-lal'*

1) to profane, defile, pollute, desecrate

1a) (Niphal)

1a1) to profane oneself, defile oneself, pollute oneself

1a1a) ritually

1a1b) sexually

COMMANDS OF GOD

Okay. So we have determined that the God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament. We have also established that both the Old and New Testaments taught that salvation was through grace and the issue of keeping the commands of God deal with the idea, “*if we are saved, how then shall we live?*” We have further learned that Jesus taught the same thing about love that God the Father did – if we love God, we will obey His commands.

What did he teach about mixing the things of God and the things of idols, then? Does God mind the act or is it something He hates?

Remember, we are to ensure that we do not add or take away from that which God commands.

Keeping things Associated with Idols and/or Pagans

God does not even want us to be in the habit of keeping things **even associated** with idols.

-
- 1a2) to be polluted, be defiled
 - 1b) (Piel)
 - 1b1) to profane, **make common, defile, pollute**
 - 1b2) **to violate the honour of, dishonour**
 - 1b3) to violate (a covenant)
 - 1b4) **to treat as common**
 - 1c) (Pual) to profane (name of God)
 - 1d) (Hiphil) to let be profaned

According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, the word, profane has two main meanings, depending on how the word is used. If it is used as a verb, the meanings are as follows;

- 1 : **to treat (something sacred) with abuse, irreverence, or contempt** : DESECRATE
- 2 : to debase by a wrong, unworthy, or vulgar use

If it is used as an adjective, these are the meanings:

- 1 : not concerned with religion or religious purposes : SECULAR
- 2 : **not holy because unconsecrated, impure, or defiled** : UNSANCTIFIED
- 3 : **serving to debase or defile what is holy** : IRREVERENT

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

You shall burn the carved images of their gods with fire; *you shall not covet the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it for yourselves, lest you be snared by it*; for it is an abomination to the LORD your God. *Nor shall you bring an abomination into your house, lest you be doomed to destruction like it. You shall utterly detest it and utterly abhor it, for it is an accursed thing.*²⁶⁶

In the Old Testament when they were going in to possess the Land that the Lord had given them, they were told that the goods in the cities that were normally kept as spoils of war, were accursed; the Israelites were not to have anything to do with them. The people were not to take the goods as spoils of war, simply because it was associated with idols. *This was not an issue of worshipping the idols or other things; just keeping these things against the wishes of God.*

In Joshua 7, we read of a man, Achan, who disobeyed this express command. God's response to this rebellion from Achan was quick and powerful. First, He judged that the entire people of Israel had sinned because of one man's rebellion (verse 1). As a result, even though they should have won, the Israelites were defeated at Ai (vss. 2-6). When Joshua inquired of the Lord regarding the failure (vss. 6-9), He responded by telling Joshua that He would not be with Israel until the accursed objects were destroyed and the person (and his family) responsible killed then burned with the spoils (vss. 7-15). This was completed and God's fury was abated (vss. 16-26).

We also read in the book of Numbers that He has a regulative form of worship; He has told us what is appropriate and what is not because we have a fallen nature and on our own, cannot discern what is right or wrong. Whenever mankind is left to the freedom of their own devices, our tendency is to do what is inappropriate in God's eyes, no matter how good our intentions are:

Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners. And you shall have the tassel, *that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the LORD and do them, and that you*

²⁶⁶ Deuteronomy 7:25, 26

COMMANDS OF GOD

may not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined, *and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God.* I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the LORD your God.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁷ Numbers 15:38-41

16

Chapter 16: The Word of God Never Returns Void

Doubtless, the Word of God never returns void. We are told in Isaiah that His word will always accomplish that which He sets out to have it do.

“For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”²⁶⁸

Paul tells his followers about people who were preaching the message of Jesus out of vain ambition; he was not too worried, because whatever the person’s motives, if the Gospel was being preached, the Word of God would accomplish what He desired.

But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confi-

²⁶⁸ Isaiah 55:10-11

THE WORD OF GOD NEVER RETURNS VOID

dent by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will: ***The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains;*** but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. What then? Only that in every way, ***whether in pre- tense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.***²⁶⁹

No matter the circumstance under which God's word is spoken, God can - and does - use the opportunity to bring people to Himself. This truth is amply evidenced in many circumstances found in the Word of God - and in everyday life. While we can rejoice that Christ is preached, we should also be careful not to be a part of the problem.

Even if all of the faithful were to be silenced, the Word of God would somehow be brought to the world. Jesus recounted to the Pharisees regarding the silencing of His disciples:

Then they brought him to Jesus. And they threw their own clothes on the colt, and they set Jesus on him. And as He went, many spread their clothes on the road. Then, as He was now drawing near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen, saying: "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the LORD!" Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" And some of the Pharisees called to Him from the crowd, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples." But He answered and said to them, "**I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out.**"²⁷⁰

Creation itself will attest to the Glory of God, even if we are not around to speak the truth in love. In the book of Revelation, we are told that at one point in time, an angel will preach the everlasting Gospel.

Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on

²⁶⁹ Philippians 1:12-18

²⁷⁰ Luke 19:35 - 40

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

the earth-to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people-saying with a loud voice, "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water."²⁷¹

I must admit, it is somewhat of a relief that God can – and does – speak to whomever He needs to, regardless of my own failures. However, failures and errors are not things we as believers are supposed to remain in, once we have been redeemed. We need to strive to worship Him in both Spirit *and* Truth.

What Does This Have To Do With Us?

In the fourth century, the New Testament Church took a detour from the Truth and decided that they were *strong enough*²⁷² to be able to integrate things from paganism. Why? Because of the Roman mindset that says it is all right to command and conquer.

Against the clear words of the Lord, the Church coveted the things of their former lives and the world, and instead of detesting them, as we should; we have embraced them and agreed to include them in our worship to the Holy One of Israel. We, like Achan, have chosen to hide these items of non-biblical faith deep under the tents of our lives, in order that we may bring them out and enjoy them. We have buried the origins of these pagan things so deep that most of us are not even really aware of these roots.

But We Are Sincere – We Want to Worship God with All We Have

What about sincerity? Shouldn't that count for something in the eyes of God?

As we have already seen, whether we are sincere or not, the fact is when we try to worship God in a way that He has not ordained in His Word, we risk his wrath.

²⁷¹ Revelation 14:6, 7

²⁷² Remember the passage where Paul asks the believers if they think they are stronger than God, that they choose to provoke the Holy God to jealousy with their actions of eating meat sacrificed to idols.

THE WORD OF GOD NEVER RETURNS VOID

Others have chosen to justify the behaviour, not unlike Saul. In two separate instances, Saul chose to do things his own way, in order to “honour God”. The first time, as chronicled in I Kings 13:8-14, he decided that since Samuel wasn’t around (the only one who was allowed to make sacrifices to God on behalf of Israel), it would be all right to burn a sacrifice to God, since the situation seemed to be critical.

He burned the sacrifice sincerely, wanting to make sure he “*made supplication to the Lord*” (vss. 11-12). Nevertheless, Samuel told Saul that because of his decision to do a burnt offering in a manner that was not approved of the Lord, Saul lost the entire kingdom of Israel for his offspring. Listen to the proclamation:

And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly. **You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you.** For now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you."²⁷³

The second time Saul ignored God (this story is found in I Kings 15) was when he was told to utterly destroy the people, the livestock and the goods of Amalek because of what they had done to Israel (vss. 1-3). Saul thought he knew better than God and under his direction, got the Israelites to spare the king of the country’s life and keep the choice animals and goods; he only destroyed that which was worthless. Then, when he was confronted with the sin, instead of confessing, he simply tried to justify himself by saying the contraband goods were taken for the glory of God.

What is Christmas, but an adoption of the culture, behaviours, and articles of another’s idolatrous faith? We have chosen to supplant the Lord’s truth with, at best, second rate myths and untruths – to do what? To enable us to be able to speak with the world about a Saviour that is not even accurately represented by this feast day.

²⁷³ I Samuel 13:13, 14

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

Just because God has stayed His hand of judgment is not proof that He is all right with it. The Word of God in context makes it clear that He **hates** the practices of the pagan world and does not want us to even have a *vague* association with it. So why have we chosen to love the world more than Him?

17

Chapter 17: Adopting the Practices of the World

God condemns the act of adopting any of the practices of the non-believers who are around us.

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'I am the LORD your God. **According to the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do; and according to the doings of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do; nor shall you walk in their ordinances.** 'You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am the LORD your God.²⁷⁴

We seem to forget that in the "Love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength" part, we should follow what He says and to not do things that may provoke Him to jealousy, knowingly or unknowingly. In His own words, we are NOT to adopt any of the practices of the pagan peoples around us, even if we think it is all right.

"When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not

²⁷⁴ Leviticus 18:1-4

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.' *"You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. **Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.**"*²⁷⁵

I need to remind you all that although this was written to the Israelites, it still applies to all believers in Christ, since we are grafted into Israel. Should you need a more in-depth explanation, please see "Appendix A" of this book. "Why Do Some Teach that the Church will Endure Tribulation; A Refutation". Within this article, I explore this subject systematically.

We are not to care about or love the practices of the world. You will notice that most non-believers despise the Jesus of the Bible, but happily celebrate Christmas. This is what the New Testament has to say about our desire to be accepted by the world:

And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For **what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.** The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it. And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail."²⁷⁶

Flirting with the World Provokes Him to Jealousy

Many think that these passages deal only with the active taking of idols and worshipping them; however, I would counter that the passage in Corinthians contradicts this theory:

Observe Israel after the flesh: **Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?** What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is

²⁷⁵ Deuteronomy - 12:29-32

²⁷⁶ Luke 16:15-17

ADOPTING THE PRACTICES OF THE WORLD

anything? Rather, that **the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?** All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being.²⁷⁷

Although Paul talked about the freedom we have to choose to eat meat sacrificed to idols, here he cautions believers not to, since this *seemingly* innocuous act could very well provoke God to jealousy.

Esteeming the World's Practices

I have heard it said a number of times that if we give up Christmas, we will no longer have a point of contact with the rest of the world and that we may offend them in our choices.

I must ask, “Since when is the world supposed to be the barometer by which we choose to celebrate or not celebrate something?”

Since becoming a Christian, I have been assured – and often in my earlier years, scolded – that the Book is to be our only real source of Truth. It stands above all and is the gauge by which we measure things around us. Christmas should be just as subject to the Word of God as every other thing we do. According to *its* words, we are not supposed to be worried about what the world does or does not do.

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.²⁷⁸

To esteem the practices of the world is tantamount to spiritual adultery:

²⁷⁷ 1 Corinthians 10:18 – 24

²⁷⁸ I John 2:15-17

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? But He gives more grace. Therefore He says:

"God resists the proud,
But gives grace to the humble."

Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.²⁷⁹

In the book of I Kings, we see a similar behaviour as what we find in the celebration of Christmas. Most people in Christendom are sincere about their desire to worship God in their keeping of the day of Christmas. However, the pagan elements brought in have been "made" holy by the act of the Church choosing to give them "Christian" meaning. They have made new days not ordained by God and they have called this form of idolatry "worship". Listen to the story:

Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the mountains of Ephraim, and dwelt there. Also he went out from there and built Peniel. And Jeroboam said in his heart, "Now the kingdom may return to the house of David: If these people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn back to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and go back to Rehoboam king of Judah." Therefore the king asked advice, made two calves of gold, and said to the people, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!" And he set up one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan. He made shrines on the high places, and made priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi. Jeroboam ordained a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the feast that was in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar. So he did at

²⁷⁹ James 4:4-10

ADOPTING THE PRACTICES OF THE WORLD

Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he had made. And at Bethel he installed the priests of the high places which he had made. So he made offerings on the altar which he had made at Bethel on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, in the month which he had devised in his own heart. And he ordained a feast for the children of Israel, and offered sacrifices on the altar and burned incense.²⁸⁰

What does God's word have to say about our ways?

He tells us, "there is a way that seems right to man, but the end is destruction."

Seek the LORD while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts."²⁸¹

²⁸⁰ I Kings 12: 25-33

²⁸¹ Isaiah 55:6-9

18

Chapter 18: Holding Fast to the Truth – in Most Things

There are some *amazing* Christian leaders here in North America who consistently condemn the traditions and the fables of the nations (and even believers) by standing firm on the Word of God in context. These leaders (and many other like them) almost always point believers who are unsure about an issue, back to the Word of God. Their catch phrases are those found in the Bible; in fact, most believe wholeheartedly in the verses that I have mentioned earlier in my introduction. They would also point to verses like this:

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.²⁸²

But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from

²⁸² Hebrews 4:12-13

HOLDING FAST TO THE TRUTH - IN MOST THINGS

childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. **All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.**²⁸³

I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: **Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.** But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.²⁸⁴

What I have found most interesting about these amazing scholars of the Word (whom I look up to in the faith in almost all things), is that they choose to doggedly hold onto the tradition of Christmas and use a couple of Scriptures to “prove” that it indeed is “in the Bible”.

There are ministries that have consistently denounced the Roman Catholic Church for erecting traditions and practices that are extra-biblical, non-biblical, and even anti-biblical and hold that they are people who look to the Scriptures alone for their queues, but these same ministries write apologetics papers about why it is right to keep the celebration of Christmas.

Interestingly, still others hold fast to Christmas, at least in part because other pseudo-Christian organizations denounce it as pagan in origin. We need to stop being so worried about being identified with other groups and start worrying about what God might have to say about the issue.

²⁸³ I Timothy 3:13-17

²⁸⁴ II Timothy 4:1-5

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

I also feel the need to remind other believers that if there was absolutely NO truth in such organizations, people would generally not adhere to their belief systems in any way, shape or form. Generally, the cults include both orthodox and heretical doctrines in their body of teaching material. **It is the extra-biblical and anti-biblical assertions that make these organizations unacceptable, not absolutely everything about them.**

19

Chapter 19: Conclusion

Throughout this book, we have explored many of the elements that comprise the celebration we know commonly as “Christmas”. From there, the word of God has been mined and the nuggets of truth have been panned-out to shed light onto the customs and elements we scrutinised.

Overall, we have discovered some things:

1. The name of Christmas relates to an anti-biblical teaching known as the “Mass of Christ”; as such, *if* we must celebrate His birthday, we should pick a more appropriate name.
2. Christ’s birth was not even celebrated for the first two centuries following His death.
3. When people began to speculate about the date of His birth, there were many possible theories.
4. There were many vocal opponents to the celebration of Jesus’ birth, both in the beginning of the celebration and throughout history.
5. Current scholarship points to either September/October or the

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

Spring as the more likely time of His birth.

6. Within the Scriptures, sacrifices, covenants, baptism, and even the way our Lord was crucified is delineated. The maintaining of these things is not the same thing as “baptising” the non-biblical aspects of the celebration of Christmas.
7. Liberty in Christ does not mean we have freedom to sin.
8. Romans 6:14-23 illustrates that because we are NOT under the Law but under grace, we should ensure that sin should not be our master. Instead, we are to become slaves of righteousness.
9. I Corinthians 10:23 tells us that while all things are lawful, not all things are profitable. Notably, some things may provoke God to jealousy (such as the keeping of some elements from worship to idols). In the immediate context, it is about eating meat, but the overall concept can certainly be applied because God has always been a jealous God. He has always said that some things cause His anger and jealousy to burn.²⁸⁵
10. The most logical reading of the passage in Romans 14 pertains not to man-made feasts, but to biblical feasts, as outlined in the Old Testament. There were some within Christendom who were likely insisting that all believers HAD to observe these days fastidiously; Paul dispels the myth. Romans 14 teaches us that while we have freedom to worship and choose to or not to celebrate the feasts that God set forth in the Old Testament and began to fulfill (and will continue to fulfill) through Christ, I would contend, based on Scripture that we cannot baptise any old pagan celebration and make it our own with a few adjustments. While the Roman Catholic Church

²⁸⁵ I would agree that pagans can be converted; I vehemently disagree with the assertion that pagan temples can be thus consecrated. There are many, many pagans in our world today who know and proclaim that these elements are very decidedly pagan and we are not helping our cause of the Gospel by continuing to perpetuate them. Can we not simply preach the simple Gospel? Did God not do a good enough job? Why do we need to lure people into the Kingdom?

CONCLUSION

believed in replacement theology (we are now the biggest, therefore we take over your symbols), God wanted His people to have nothing to do with the practices and customs of the non-believers. Even in the New Testament, we are to be seen as a “peculiar” people; people who are not the same as everyone else.

11. While Paul did write Romans 14, we also have Paul using the word pictures of these same feast days to teach and he himself continued to celebrate them. Additionally, there are some feast days that we *are* required to celebrate, most notably the Feast of Unleavened Bread (often called the Day of Preparation – when Jesus was killed), the Passover (Jesus is our Passover Lamb), and the Feast of Firstfruits (Jesus’ resurrection). The early church likely also celebrated the Feast of Pentecost (when the Holy Spirit came). In the Millennium, the entire world will also be required to celebrate the Feast of Booths, if Zechariah 14 is to be believed, anyway.

In essence, Romans 14 tells us that the Keeping of Holy Time with all of the Feast Days of the Old Testament is optional; however, if the believer *wants* to keep holy time, he/she should be permitted to do this without constant haranguing by the rest of Christendom. The choice was given to either celebrate the feasts or to view all days as the same, not to be able to integrate pagan elements into our worship and call it holy unto the Lord.

Finally, *even if* one takes on the more contemporary reading of this passage to include the celebration of festivals of our own making to the glory of the Lord, nowhere in scripture are we given permission to “sanctify” pagan practices as our own. We can perhaps set aside any day we would like, but the behaviours, conduct and even elements of these days that we set aside should not include pagan elements of worship to other gods.

12. It is from the Roman ideology, not Scripture, that the Church got the idea that it was all right to add things into our worship, based on the “Command and Conquer” presupposition. This same line of thought is the culprit for some within the church

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

believing that Israel has been replaced. This is just not the case. We, as believers, have been GRAFTED into Israel; the non-believing people in Israel have been cut off, but if we decide to walk in unbelief, we too will be cut off. Likewise, any from Israel who were formerly unbelieving but who come to faith will be grafted in again. This is certainly NOT Replacement Theology; it is God's economy of Grace.

13. Many decidedly heathen celebrations were, at least in part, the likely reason December 25 was chosen as the day to commemorate Jesus' birth.
14. Many, many of the elements that we associate with Christmas have their origins in these non-Biblical celebrations. These include (but are not limited to) holly, ivy, mistletoe, and laurels.
15. The Christmas tree, while it may have some claim to its origin in Christendom, also owes part of its inception to – you guessed it – pagan practices. When they first started appearing in Germany, at least one theologian was unimpressed because of the fact that people began to focus on it more than Christ. This is still the case today often.
16. Gifts – many say that they are honouring Jesus, but if this were the case, He would be the One getting the gifts, not the people. The gifts themselves take away from the focus on Christ and put it instead on the obligation to exchange gifts with loved ones – and acquaintances, et cetera.
17. While the personage of Santa Claus may have some of its history in Christendom, little is really known about the figure of St. Nicholas that we often attribute this character. As we have seen, what has resulted is actually a pretender, a false christ. He is even given the term, Kriss Kringle, which is a variation of the German phrase which means the “Christ Child”. This pretender is the giver of materialism; if Christians feel the need to *have* to celebrate Christmas, this figurehead should be expunged from Christmas altogether. It leads young children *away* from Christ, not to Him.

CONCLUSION

18. The practice of Wassailing predates Christmas. While there is a biblical element to the singing of carols, and there are biblical carols, these should be sung throughout the year, not just around December. Other carols have decidedly unbiblical themes in their lyrics.
19. The Gospel, according to the Bible does not seem to sound like the same teaching that is being sent forth through the medium of Christmas; on occasion, perhaps it might touch a chord or two, but for the most part, it would not seem so. We should be careful not to be perpetuating lies in the name of God; if we continue in this practice, we are guilty of being false witnesses to Him, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.
20. If one were to ask the average non-believer what the message of the Gospel of Christ was, based on Christmas, they would generally not have gleaned the truth from this feast day. Instead, peace on earth and goodwill to all men is heard. When the world hears this, they are not hearing the calls to righteousness that are required; Jesus' peace will come to men only when they choose to follow Him. They also generally perceive a small baby, whose mother seems to be the chief figure. This aspect of the celebration can cause believers and non-believers alike to be more susceptible to the erroneous belief in the many apparitions of Mary. All in all, while it is possible to get the Gospel from Christmas, it is not very likely. Instead, all of the other things crowd out what little biblical content is in it.
21. God's nature never changes, He is holy and He is also jealous for our worship.
22. Biblical salvation consists of four basic premises: Man is a sinner, God is Love, Jesus is the Way, and Faith is the key.
23. The focus of our preaching should be modeled on the Biblical premise; that is, *the Cross of Christ*, not the crèche of Christ. The celebration of His death, burial and resurrection need to be what we focus on moreso than His birth. Should *we not take our cues* from the Word and the Apostles, rather than

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

from later tradition? In 1 Corinthians 11:1-2 Paul admonishes believers everywhere, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you.” And again, “Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.”²⁸⁶

24. Whether or not one chooses to celebrate Christmas has nothing to do with salvation because we are saved by Grace.
25. The role of obedience is subordinate to salvation; in other words, we do not keep the moral obligation of the Law, that is, the commandments **to be** saved; we keep them **because** we are saved. When Christians say things like “this is not an issue of salvation”, they are really saying that they have the freedom to do something because they are saved by grace, yet these same Christians would be deeply offended if another believer chose to commit adultery or murder, and then say “this is not an issue of salvation”. While in all cases, these statements are true, nevertheless, the keeping of the commandments are a non-negotiable issue for believers of the Book. We keep the commandments out of obedience to God because He said that if we loved Him, we would obey His commands.
26. God tells us in His Word over and over that He hates us mixing that which is holy with the profane. He even detests us having things **associated** with the worship of idols.
27. Thankfully, the Word of God never returns void. Because of this, even though we have made a real mess of trying to preach the Gospel our own way by adding things and leaving things out, whenever even a bit of the Word of God is preached, it will accomplish that which He has set out for it to do.
28. Just because God can fix our mistakes doesn’t mean we should perpetuate non-biblical truth. It is our duty as believers to choose His ways and His truth over our own thoughts and

²⁸⁶ II Thessalonians 2:15

CONCLUSION

plans.

29. Sincerity is no excuse, especially when you know the truth. Saul was sincere when he disobeyed God, not once but twice in serious issues. Then, when he was confronted, he did not repent. Instead, he continued to profess his innocence. This stubbornness resulted in the Lord removing the Kingdom of Israel from his family line and removing the Holy Spirit from him. Pretty harsh.
30. God tells us in His word that we are to be different from the world. As we have seen, there is little difference in the practice of the world regarding Christmas celebrations and that of Christians. We are to despise the things of the world, not embrace them and then use them as excuses to evangelise. We need to remember that God's word is enough. We do not need to add to His simple truth to make the Gospel more palatable.

The evidence that we have seen here points to the fact that the early church (both the Church of Acts and in the first two centuries) paid close attention to teaching His death, burial and resurrection; they paid much less attention to His birth.

For me, as I have investigated these things, I have become convinced that while this is not an issue of salvation, our God is a Holy God who has asked us to worship Him in Spirit and Truth.

It is not inappropriate to remember the incarnation of our Lord and Saviour; however, it is never appropriate to incorporate non-biblical traditions and attitudes in order to do this, however. **If we do** choose to celebrate His birth, I would encourage His people not do it on December 25th, if possible. If you feel you must celebrate on this day, I would encourage you to check everything you are doing to ensure it is, indeed, being done to the and for the glory of God, rather than tradition and comfort.

Additionally, as believers in the risen Lord, whose blood has covered our sins once for all, we should not call it the name it has been given, since the name refers to the Catholic Mass, which is in opposition to the teachings of the Holy Spirit and therefore, the title is not becoming to the nature of our Lord. We should also carefully remind people that

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

this is just a **memorial celebration**; Jesus *is not still the Christ Child* – He is the Conquering Ram of the Revelation; He is God Almighty who died and yet lives. In trying to overcome the enemy, the Devil, we have chosen in Christianity to fall into another of his traps. This should not be so.

As a witness of Christ, I do not want to be called a “false witness” of the Lord, nor do I want to inadvertently cause God to become angry and jealous, even if I *might* have the freedom to do so.

Having said all of that, I would encourage people of the Word to utilise this holiday as a bridge to bring people to the Messiah of the world. There is no doubt that during the Christmas season, people seem to be more open to discussing these things. We need to be bridge builders (as opposed to village makers); as such, we can take the grains of truth that have been strewn throughout this holiday and use them to point people to the Only One who can save their souls. This does not necessarily mean we must retain the non-biblical elements of this holiday in order to evangelise.

As a child, I used to believe everything I was told; I went ahead and did whatever it was someone told me to do without question. As I grew older, I began to realise that not everything was true, just because people said so. As an adult in the Lord, I have been taught to investigate everything to ensure that my behaviour is in line with the words of our Lord. Wherever they are not, I need to change my thought patterns, no matter how uncomfortable they are. While we do not have access to the fullness of the Truth on this side of our last breath,²⁸⁷ we still need to be faithful to what we are shown, inasmuch as it is possible.

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect

²⁸⁷ The Bible is not an exhaustive source of the Truths of God, as we are told by the Evangelist in John 21:25. We will only fully understand everything once we are in His presence and He grants us that fullness of understanding. For now, we continue to “see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face.” – 1 Corinthians 13:12

CONCLUSION

man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; ***that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head-Christ-*** from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, ***that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.*** But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. ***Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another.***²⁸⁸

²⁸⁸ Ephesians 4:11-25

SECTION IV

APPENDICES

“Appendix A”

Critique Article: “Why Do Some Teach that the Church will Endure the Tribulation?”²⁸⁹

Introduction: The Background

“The church began on the day of Pentecost; before then, the promises and the warnings that were given in Scripture by Jesus, regarding the end-times, were mostly directed to God’s FIRST People, the Jews”.

The relationship between the Jewish people and the church has been widely written about by the saints and has been endlessly debated by the great minds of Christendom. Pretribulationist dispensationalists have often made these kinds of statements, both to their proponents and to their opponents alike. Among the more staunch promoters of this theory, is the man, Grant Jeffrey. In his pre-tribulation book, *Triumphant Return*, he outlines his perspective with regard to the place the church and the descendants of Israel have within weave of the eschatologically coloured prophetic tapestry formed within the pages of Scripture.

The Article and Its Contentions

In an excerpt of this book, entitled “Why Do Some Teach that the Church will Endure the Tribulation?” he discusses his stance on these matters. Jeffrey’s basic contentions regarding the reasons some reject the pre-tribulation rapture theory are as follows.

The First Contention – Emotional Reasons

There is an “emotional contention that it would be unfair for the modern Church to escape to heaven scot free to escape the martyrdom that other believers have experienced”. He goes on to say in this section that while the emotion is valid, this is not a good enough reason to deny the teaching of the pretribulation rapture on its own. He then reminds his readers that while many will go through tribulation before

²⁸⁹ I wrote this book in 2003 as a part of the requirements for a course I was taking in Seminary, Systematic Theology III.

the actual Rapture and have done so in the past already, the fact remains that many millions of believers have lived their lives out in a time of peace and many others have already gone to glory, thus escaping the Great Tribulation. He also brings to his readers' attentions that many pretribulation critics seem to have an "incorrect and unscriptural belief that the Church will somehow be purified by enduring the wrath of the Antichrist".

The Second Contention – The Separate Nature of Israel and the Church

His second contention about why some reject the teaching of the pretribulation Rapture is because of the "failure to distinguish between God's plan for Israel and His plan for the Church, especially in the prophecy revealed by Christ in Matthew 24". Jeffrey states that while these opponents of the pretribulation Rapture "often acknowledge that there is strong biblical evidence for a pretribulation Rapture, ... they inevitably come back to their interpretation of Matthew 24, which seems to indicate that the Rapture follows the events of the Great Tribulation". He believes that because Jesus does not explicitly mention the church, the "plain interpretation is that Israel is the primary focus of the Prophecy of Matthew 24". As he continues to delineate his perspective, he asserts that Matthew 24 is not about tribulation in general²⁹⁰, but what he would deem the Great Tribulation²⁹¹, which is the wrath of Satan in his understanding. He further argues that the "gathering together of the elect" mentioned in Matthew 24 refers to those who have believed during the tribulation, not the actual Rapture of the church mentioned in I Corinthians 15 and I Thessalonians 4. He further hypothesises that there will be no visible signs that precede the Rapture; Matthew 24 shows that there are signs that precede this call-

²⁹⁰ That is, Matthew 24 is not merely about general troubles and persecutions; instead, he believes it is a clear reference to a portion of a literal 7-year period mentioned in scripture, often called "the Tribulation" and the "Great Tribulation".

²⁹¹ According to Jeffrey and many of his proponents, the Great Tribulation constitutes the last 3 ½ years of the 7-year tribulation period; a time when he is sure the Church will have been removed, since he believes that the first 3 ½ years of this 7-year period constitute the wrath of God, a time the Church is not appointed to endure, according to I Thessalonians 1:10 and I Thessalonians 5:9.

ing, therefore it cannot refer to the actual Rapture, since it has to be imminent.

The Third Contention – Historical Grounds

His third and final contention about why people reject the teaching of the pretribulation rapture is that some have said the pre-tribulation position has not been taught prior to the 1800’s and so, must be rejected as a false teaching.

The Response

Regarding Contentions One and Three

After reviewing these three contentions Mr. Jeffrey makes, with regard to the pretribulation Rapture, this author would say that she agrees with the basic statement behind his first contention about emotions not being the sole determinant for decision-making. It is never wise to make a resolution, exclusively upon one’s feelings, since the Truth and emotions are often divergent. This author would also agree with Mr. Jeffrey, regarding his concern that some wrongly believe that Christians need to go through tribulation to somehow make them worthy to come into the presence of God; this belief is in opposition with the Truth.²⁹²

Neither is the third contention of much concern; first of all, Daniel was told that many things within the book would be sealed until the time of the end, so there is a likelihood that many of these mysteries about the end-times will not come to light until the final hour.²⁹³ Secondly, length of time in practice does not guarantee authenticity; after all, Gnosticism has endured within some factions of the Church for many, many centuries. Nevertheless, it is still a heresy. What is of central importance is whether the teaching can be fully supported through

²⁹² God does allow us to go through tribulation to help us with our sanctification; however we are already justified in God’s sight. Even without sanctification after acceptance of Christ (i.e. salvation on one’s death bed), one is seen as clean enough to enter God’s presence because of the washing power of the Lamb’s blood in the believer’s life.

²⁹³ (Daniel 8:26). Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations in this book are taken from the *New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1986).

Scripture in context.

The Second Contention- The Real Concern

It is with the second issue that this author is primarily troubled. Mr Jeffrey suggested that one of the reasons people refuse to believe the teachings of the pretribulation Rapture is because they fail “to distinguish between God's plan for Israel and His plan for the Church, especially in the prophecy revealed by Christ in Matthew 24”. From the perspective of the person writing this book, Grant Jeffrey’s central point and the peripheral issues found in his second contention are largely unfounded. The rest of this book will address the 4 primary issues that are raised within his argument.

The Separate Nature of the Jews and the Church – His Main Concern

Mr. Jeffrey’s main concern centres on the idea that the Jews and the Church are somehow *completely* different and that God is going to deal with them separately. It must be conceded that Paul does say that they (the Jews) *have* been blinded by God until the time of the Gentiles is fulfilled. However, this blindness is only a part of the issue; there is still choice involved here.²⁹⁴

In John 15:5-7, Jesus reminds people that He is the vine and those who abide in Him are the branches; only those who abide in Him will remain within the plant; those who do not abide in Him will be cut-off and burnt.

Later, in Romans 11, Paul explains that God has not cast away his people, but according to the election of grace, there is a remnant, of which Paul is one.²⁹⁵ He then goes on to elucidate through an exten-

²⁹⁴ Romans 11:25 tells the reader that the blindness has come *in part* because of God. Earlier in 11:23, Paul explains that they, the natural branches, have a chance to be grafted back in, if they do not *continue in their unbelief*. In this author’s humble opinion, the issue is still the same as it has always been; all people have the ability to seek the Lord. When God is sought out and the person bows to the will of God in faith and believe that Yeshua is the Messiah promised, he/she will be welcomed into the fold, along with all of the others, who have believed in faith.

²⁹⁵ Romans 11:1-5

“APPENDIX A”

sion of the plant metaphor that *all* believers have been grafted into the tree that was originally the Jews’.²⁹⁶ Furthermore, those of Israel who do not believe in faith have been cut off from the olive tree, but they can be grafted in again, by believing in Jesus, the promised One.²⁹⁷ Likewise, Paul explains that God can cut off the wild olive branches (Gentile believers), if they fall from belief into unbelief.²⁹⁸

The Tribulation

The second issue is based on his supposition that the tribulation Jesus spoke about was only going to occur during the Great Tribulation, a time when he is sure the Church will have been removed, since he believes that a) we cannot know the day or hour, but we will, if we are still here when the peace treaty, initiated by the Antichrist is signed²⁹⁹ and b) the Church is not appointed to endure the wrath of God, according to I Thessalonians 1:10 and I Thessalonians 5:9. While this author agrees with the fact that the Church is not appointed to God’s wrath, she would like to bring to the reader’s attention the fact that the wrath of God is not mentioned in Revelation until *after* the signs spoken of in Matthew 24 and illustrated in Revelation as the first 6 seals.³⁰⁰ As such, there is little warrant for his assertion that we will be gone at the beginning, before the seals, since the wrath of the Lamb (who is God) does not begin until the opening of 6 of the seals,³⁰¹ if one is to follow

²⁹⁶ Romans 11:17, 19

²⁹⁷ Romans 11:23

²⁹⁸ Romans 11:21, 22

²⁹⁹ It must be said that this belief was not explicitly delineated within this particular article; however, its sentiments are certainly found throughout the book itself, as well as within many of Mr. Jeffrey’s publications.

³⁰⁰ Please compare Matthew 24:3-31 with Revelation 6:1-17; you will note the correlation between the two.

³⁰¹ In the dispensational pretribulation theory, it is said that the opening of the 7 seals are to occur after the Rapture of the Church, rather than before. As such, from the perspective of this theory, the Matthew 24/Revelation 6 passages regarding the wrath and the taking away of the elect have been loose ends that have been in need of tying. There is no need to try to fix this problem, however, if one just recognises the fact that 1) the elect is the church, comprised of believers from all ages, 2) the

the plain meaning of the passage.

The Elect

Thirdly, Mr. Jeffrey contends that only the elect Jews are going to be gathered from the four corners of the earth, as mentioned in Matthew 24. It is his belief that the passage is not speaking to the Church, since the Church had not yet been established, when Jesus had spoken this prophecy and since He did not explicitly mention the Church. In his theology, the church will already have been taken up to meet the Lord in the air by the time this prophecy is fulfilled. This catching away of the elect tribulation saints (presumably Jewish) is supposed to happen mid-way through the tribulation period, unlike the Rapture spoken of by Paul in I Corinthians and I Thessalonians.

Again, this author would like to respectfully disagree with Mr. Jeffrey with regard to his supposition. The central issue here is the identity of the elect. According to the Word of God in the New Testament, the elect are not those who are necessarily descended from the 12 tribes of Israel in a physical sense, but all those who come to faith in Christ through grace. For instance, Romans 9:11 tells us that those who are of the election are those whom God calls, Romans 11:7 says that Israel has not obtained what the elect have obtained and that the rest are blinded to the truth, in Colossians 3:12, Paul addressed the church of Colosse as the elect of God, holy and beloved and in I Thessalonians 1:4, Paul, speaking to the church of Thessalonica, (and all of the other churches to which this letter was circulated) reminded them that they are to know their election by God. Clearly then, based on Scripture in context, it appears that the elect are those whom God has called to be partakers in the faith, through Jesus Christ. Paul also says in Romans 9 that only the children of promise are considered to be heirs – the elect. As such, regardless of when those of physical Israel come to faith, the issue is that they are not really considered elect *until* they come into faith. Moreover, as mentioned before, there is ample Scriptural evidence that the Church has been adopted into the family of Israel *and* those who were within the nation of Israel but did not be-

gathering of the elect in Matthew 24 is indeed, the same gathering as that mentioned in Revelation 6, as well as I Thessalonians 4 and I Corinthians 15 and 3) the first 6 seals are not necessarily a part of the “official” 7 years of the famous peace treaty that is supposed to be signed by the Antichrist.

“APPENDIX A”

lieve in Christ, once He came, have been cut-off from Israel (see point “a” in this refutation).

As has been clearly delineated, Paul refers to those in the Church as the elect. Therefore, it logically follows that when Jesus spoke of the elect being gathered from the four corners of the world to meet Him in the air in Matthew 24, He was not merely speaking of the Jews, but *all* those who have come to faith through election (the calling of God), both those who are a part of Israel’s bloodline physically and through faith, as well as those who are only Israel through faith itself³⁰².

The Signs

The fourth and final aspect of Mr. Jeffrey’s second contention that this author disagrees with is that of his belief that the Rapture of the Church is going to happen, independent of any external signs. This is in complete opposition with Scripture. Listen to what Paul has to say to the Church of Thessalonica about a Rapture that is not preceded by signs in II Thessalonians 2:1-8:

Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. **Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed**, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? **And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time**. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; **only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed**, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming....

³⁰² While this author does not disagree that some of the events spoken of in Matthew 24 may well occur in Israel and that the Lord still loves His first Chosen people, it does not necessarily follow that because of these things, the Church *must* be taken out before any portion of the tribulation mentioned in the end-times, nor does it prove that there will be a second snatching away.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

So then, from the passage written almost two millennia before, it can clearly be seen that this was written to refute the idea that the Rapture would occur without some specific events occurring first:

- a) There must be a falling away (apostasy) from the Church. In the end, there will be true believers and those who have a form of godliness, but deny its power”.³⁰³
- b) The Restrainer must be removed.
- c) The man of sin, the son of perdition (that is, the Antichrist) must be revealed.

Unlike the scenario put forth by Mr. Jeffrey and others who teach that there will be no visible signs that precede the catching away of the saints, the Apostle Paul speaks in very concise terms of very real signs that *must* precede the Lord’s coming.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while this author believes that Mr. Jeffrey is a man of great faith, who desires to instruct and comfort the people of God about the soon coming of our Lord, some of his contentions within the book, *Triumphant Return* are in error. Based on this author’s understanding of Scripture in context, it seems that the Rapture of the Church will likely occur right after (or concurrent with)...

... a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place.³⁰⁴

... but sometime before the actual wrath of the Lamb begins, as He will have sent His angels to gather His elect from the four corners of the world to meet Him in the air. This is the blessed hope that the Lord spoke of. God is faithful to ensure that although we might endure some tribulation, we will not have to endure His wrath. Instead, He will call us home, perhaps even with the saying, “Well done, My good

³⁰³ II Timothy 3:5, paraphrase.

³⁰⁴ Revelation 6:12-14

“APPENDIX A”

and faithful servants”.³⁰⁵

References Cited

Jeffrey, Grant, *Triumphant Return*. “Why Do Some Teach that the Church will Endure the Tribulation?” (Toronto: Frontier. 2001. Online Version
<http://www.grantjeffrey.com/article/why_some_reject.htm>, 2002).

New King James Version (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1986).

³⁰⁵ Matthew 25:21; paraphrase.

“Appendix B”

“Zechariah’s Prestigious Honor”

At the beginning of the first century, hundreds of priests came to Jerusalem each week to serve in the Temple. The priesthood was divided into 24 courses and each course served one week twice a year, with all 24 courses on duty during the major festival weeks.

Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of sacrifices had to be offered for individual worshippers. There were tasks of purification to be tended to as well as examinations of those claiming to be cured of skin diseases. Animals brought for sacrifice had to be inspected. The temple was big business and the multitude of priests found themselves daily caught up in a beehive of activities.

Among the many tasks to be tended to daily were the community sacrifices prescribed by Moses (Numbers 28:3-4; Exodus 29:38-43). Known as the tamid, these sacrifices only required a few priests. As a result the honor of performing these sacrifices morning and evening was determined by drawing lots (Mishnah, Tamid 3:1). Following the tamid was the burning of the incense ritual, also considered a very special honor. In fact, a priest was allowed to perform this ritual only once in his lifetime. “Ye that are new to the incense preparation, come and cast lots” (Tamid 5:2).

Most temple activities took place outside the temple in the courtyard. Here the Levitical choir sang the Psalms. Sacrifices were offered on the altar in front of the sanctuary. The priests blessed the people from the temple steps. While the tamid was offered on the altar in the courtyard in front of the temple, the incense was burned on a golden altar inside the temple. (The only other routine task within the temple was the lighting of the lamps of the golden menorah.) The Mishnah provides many details relating to this ritual. The priest who was to offer the incense was accompanied by fellow priests to the top of the staircase leading into the sanctuary. Here the chosen priest entered the temple alone, offered the incense and prostrated himself and came away (Tamid 6:3).

When he came out of the temple, the priest stood on the steps leading

“APPENDIX B”

up to the sanctuary and blessed the waiting crowd.

The incense offered at the afternoon tamid was considered more sacred than that offered following the morning sacrifice. The Mishnah tells us that Rabbi Simeon declared, “the Golden Altar was dedicated only by the incense of sweet spices that was offered in the afternoon” (Menahoth 4:4). In other words, if worship were to be interrupted (as it was during the reign of Antiochus IV, 167-164 BC), it would be resumed with the afternoon sacrifice, not the morning sacrifice.

It is during the incense ceremony associated with the tamid sacrifice that Zechariah is selected to offer the incense in the temple. Luke tells us that Zechariah “was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense” (Luke 1:9-11).

As a result of his doubt regarding the angel’s message, Zechariah was left mute following this experience. When he left the temple, he was unable to pronounce the blessing on the waiting worshipers, further intensifying the mystery of this old priest’s experience within the temple.

We are not told whether this occurred during the morning or afternoon ritual. Because of the greater significance of the afternoon ceremony, it is reasonable to believe this was the occasion for Zechariah’s vision.³⁰⁶

³⁰⁶ Dr. Chris R. Bullard, *World of Jesus Institute*. December 23, 2005. “Zechariah’s Prestigious Honor” <www.woji.org>, 2005. Used with permission.

“Appendix C”

Lambs, Wolves and the Like – Animal Sacrifices in the Bible³⁰⁷

Death Was Not a Part of the Original Plan

God did not originally intend to have death in the world, BUT because He is a God who really loves us, He could not bear creating us in such a way that we had no choice; in order for us to be able to choose to obey, the possibility that we could choose to *disobey* also had to be there. Love without choice is not love at all.

God is Just

God is a just God; if He said that there could be no taking away of sins without the shedding of blood; He could not just change his mind and say “kidding”; this behaviour is outside of the Nature of God. Sin demanded justice.

God does not like it AT ALL when people treat even animals with disrespect. While they are, without a doubt, here to serve our needs, God hates it when we abuse anything He has given to us. If He has entrusted us with them, we need to be good stewards of what He gave us. In the case of the offerings, though, He asked that they be done, so that people could more clearly understand the scope and the ugliness of sin.

In instituting the sacrificial system, there were a couple of things God wanted to illustrate to people:

Sin is UGLY

God loves His creation, including the animals. He loves humans the most, though; remember, He put them in charge of the rest of Creation. Whenever a person had to take an animal to the priests or to an altar and sacrifice it, obviously, there was a lot of blood, gore, and stink.

³⁰⁷ This excerpt was taken from a letter I wrote in 2002 to a young woman who wanted to know why God needed to have lambs sacrificed, rather than, say wolves or other less endearing creatures.

“APPENDIX C”

God wanted to make it clear that sin STINKS, it is gross and disgusting, as is sin and its consequences.

The Cost of Sin is Specific

A couple of weeks ago, someone asked why God would not accept a wolf or something like that from the people as a sin offering. This is because God wanted them to understand that sin demands a personal cost from the one who is sinning. When it came to the sin offerings, God wanted the people to understand that He valued their lives, just as the people valued the lambs that they were commanded to slaughter because of their disobedience.

When it came to sin offerings, especially, God required a few specific things; the animals must be young, unmarked, healthy male animals (usually sheep or goats, but the daily offering was a male bull). The people needed to know that sin costs a life – can you imagine how expensive it would be to have to kill an animal EVERY DAY to pay for our sins?

Animal Sacrifices Could Not Fully Pay the Price

Sin required an even greater sacrifice than these animals. The Israelites had to sacrifice every day for sin. This is not because God is bloodthirsty or because he is cruel and likes to see innocent blood be shed. On the contrary. The point here that God wanted to make to His people was that the blood of bulls and goats could only cover the sins; they could not fully pay for the sins. This is because animals and humans are (obviously) not the same kind of creatures.

If the payment for sin is the loss of an equal life, then it would follow that the only way to completely pay for sin, would be to find someone (a human) who had never been touched by the taint of sin and who would be willing to die on behalf of the rest. In this case, one sin offering would be enough to cover all who wanted to claim the sacrifice as their own.

In the book of Hebrews in the New Testament, some of this is explained:

For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.

[Rosanna's note: In other words, God was foreshadowing the reality of Jesus' sacrifice for the world]. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. Therefore, when He came into the world, He said:

**"Sacrifice and offering You did not desire,
But a body You have prepared for Me.
In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin
You had no pleasure.**

Then I said, 'Behold, I have come-
In the volume of the book it is written of Me-
To do Your will, O God.' "

Previously saying, "Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them" (which are offered according to the law), then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second. **By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.**

And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. **But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever**, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. **For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.**³⁰⁸

Old Testament Sacrifices as Metaphors

Sin sacrifices were like illustrations to point to the Coming of Jesus Christ, the One who would accomplish the thing the blood of animals could never accomplish. While "sin demanded justice for our souls",³⁰⁹ God, in His mercy, chose to pay the entire bill. Jesus Christ only had to die one time, since He is God. Even though He never had to, He chose to die on our behalf and then resurrected from the dead. The full

³⁰⁸ Hebrews 10:1 – 14

³⁰⁹ I took this phrase from a song called, "Mercy Said No".

“APPENDIX C”

price of our sins (and even the sins of Adam and Eve) was completely paid for, once He died on the cross.

Basically, God loved humans so much, that while we were still in our sins, Christ came down from heaven, put on human flesh, lived a perfect life, and then sacrificed His life on our behalf. Then, He rose again. In this way, this single sin offering became enough to pay for your sins and mine. The thing is, though, if a person does not accept this sin offering on their behalf, the only other option to fully pay for sin is to die and be eternally separated from God.³¹⁰ One sin is too many to be in His presence, since He is a holy God and sin cannot be anywhere near God – it, and the sinner, would be utterly destroyed by His goodness. Only when a person’s sin is taken away, is she able to come into the presence of God and have a relationship with Him.

Interestingly, one of the last things He said, while He was on the cross, was, “It is FINISHED!”³¹¹ He knew that by choosing to die on behalf of His own creations, He had fulfilled the requirements set forth in the beginning, “If you sin, you shall surely die”.

³¹⁰ It is kind of like the concept of a store coupon. The coupon may say that you can get a free candy bar, for example, but unless a person goes to the store, gives the store clerk the coupon AND takes the bar in exchange, the coupon is really useless. It has potential for a free candy bar, but that potential is not realised, until the person redeems the coupon in exchange for the treat.

Likewise, while Jesus died for everyone’s sins, they cannot receive the amazing benefits of this sacrifice, unless they ask God to exchange their sin for the sacrifice that Christ made. Only when a person receives this gift, is it actually theirs. That is why not everyone will go to heaven. While the gift is available to all people, many never redeem the “coupon” of eternal life by accepting Jesus’ sacrifice on their own behalf. John 3:16-18 tells us:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn it, but to save it. There is no judgment awaiting those who trust him. But those who do not trust him have already been judged for not believing in the only Son of God.

³¹¹ John 19:30

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

Jesus was called the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world because He did what the blood of a lamb, goat or bull could never do. He accomplished a way for man to come back into relationship with God.

SECTION V

REFERENCES

References Cited³¹²

- Acts of the General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland, The*. Still Water Revival Books, 1997. pp. 37-38. As quoted on the website, "Against Pagan and Roman Catholic Holy-Days." *Still Water Revival Books Website*, January 12, 2006.
<<http://www.swrb.com/newslett/freebook/holyday.htm>>, January 2006.
- American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, The*, Fourth Edition. "Welkin." Houghton Mifflin Company. 2004.
- Associated Gospel Churches. "Articles of Faith and Doctrine". Burlington, ON.
<http://www.agcofcanada.com/index.php?option=com_docman&catid=26&Itemid=57&task=docclick&bid=10&limitstart=0&limit=5>, June, 2004.
- Beaulieu, David. *Landscaping @ About.Com*. "Norse Myths and Mistletoe History." About, Inc. New York Times Company. December 27, 2005.
<http://landscaping.about.com/cs/winterlandscaping1/a/mistletoe_2.htm>. 2005.
- Beccari, Cammilus. *The Catholic Encyclopedia Volume II*. "Beatification and Canonization". Ed. Robert Appleton Company, 1907. Online: Ed. K. Knight, December 27, 2005.
<<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02364b.htm>>, Last Updated October 6, 2005.
- Bede's Ecclesiastical History of England: A Revised Translation*. Chapter XXX. "A copy of the letter which Pope Gregory sent to the Abbot Mellitus, then going into Britain. [601 A.D.]" George Bell and Sons, London. 1907. Online version: Christian Classics Ethereal Library. *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of England: A Revised Translation*. Chapter XXX. "A copy of the letter which Pope Gregory sent to the Abbot Mellitus, then going into Britain.". December 26, 2005.
<<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bede/history.v.i.xxix.html>>, 2005.
- Ben Asher Morphological Hebrew Text*. Deuteronomy 18:11 The Online Bible. Vancouver, BC: Timnathserah Inc., 1995-2001.

³¹² Please note that this author does not necessarily agree with all of the views of the websites or books utilized or consulted.

REFERENCES CITED

- Brachter, Dennis, ed. *The Westminster Confession (1646)*. CRI / Voice, Institute. January 20, 2006.
<<http://www.cresourcei.org/creedwestminster.html#Chapter%2020>>.
December 24, 2005. Chapter 20 Section 2.
- Brunvand, Jan Harold B.A., M.A., Ph.D. Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia. "Santa Claus," December 30, 2005. Microsoft Corporation.
<http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761579679/Santa_Claus.html>19
97-2005.
- Bucher, Pastor Richard P.. *Evangelical Trinity Lutheran Church*. "The Origin and Meaning of the Christmas Tree." December 26, 2005.
<<http://users.rcn.com/tlc/cms/chrtree.htm#Anchor16>>, Updated November 2000.
- Bullard, Dr. Chris R. *World of Jesus Institute*. December 23, 2005. "Zechariah's Prestigious Honor" <www.woji.org>, 2005.
- Bryant, Carmen J. "Who's Watching? Removing the Cloud of Witnesses from the Amphitheater." Western Seminary. December 31, 2005.
<<http://www.westernseminary.edu/papers/Faculty/whoswatching.pdf>>,
2001.
- Calvin, John. *Commentary on Jeremiah and Lamentations Volume I*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Grand Rapids, MI. v1.0. January 20, 2006.
<http://www.ccel.org/c/calvin/comment3/comm_vol17/hm/xvii.xvi.htm>
> November 24, 1999.
- Calvin, John. *Tracts 1844*. Volume 1. Reprint Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983. Pp. 128-29.
- Catechism of the Catholic Church*. "The Celebration of the Christian Mystery" Ontario: Doubleday, 1995. Pg. 389, para. 1392.
- Coffman, Elesha. *Christian History & Biography* "Why December 25th?"
<<http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/newsletter/2000/dec08.html>>
Christianity Today International/Christian History Magazine. 2000.
- Compact Oxford English Dictionary*. "Wassail". Website; Ask Oxford.com. January 1, 2006.
<http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/wassail?view=uk>, 2006.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

Council of Trent (1551), as cited in *Catechism*, p. 385; par. 1376.

Curtis, Ken. *Glimpses Bulletin Inserts*. #84. "Let's Celebrate Christmas, but When and How?"

<<http://chi.gospelcom.net/GLIMPSEF/Glimpses/glimps084.shtml>>.

Christian History Institute. 2004.

Erickson, Millard. J. *Christian Theology*. Second Edition. Michigan; Baker. 1998. Pg. 1124.

Eusebius of Caesarea. 1996. *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, Series II, Volume I. "Ecclesiastical History"*. Trans. Richardson, Ernest Cushing. PhD. Sage Digital Library. Oregon; SAGE Software. (See also) Medieval Sourcebook. *Paul Halsell*. "Eusebius of Caesarea: The Life of the Blessed Emperor Constantine." <<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/vita-constantine.html>> May 1997.

Evans, Rosanna. *Critique Article on "Why Do Some Teach that the Church will Endure the Tribulation?"* December 29, 2002. Unpublished.

Evans, Rosanna. "Lambs, Wolves and the Like – Animal Sacrifices in the Bible." *Personal Correspondence*. Unpublished.

Former Catholics for Christ. *The GOOD NEWSletter*, "Jesus versus Santa". Former Catholics for Christ, Oct/Nov/Dec, 1997.

Fortescue, Adrian. *The Catholic Encyclopedia Volume IX*. "Liturgy of the Mass". Ed. Robert Appleton Company, 1908. Online: <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09790b.htm>> Ed. K. Knight, 2003.

Herbermann, Charles G. & Georg Grupp. *The Catholic Encyclopedia Volume IV*. "Constantine". Ed. Robert Appleton Company, 1908. Online: <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04295c.htm>> Ed. K. Knight, 2003.

History Channel. "Christmas". January 12, 2006. <<http://www.historychannel.com/exhibits/holidays/christmas/real2.html>>, January 28, 2003.

History Channel. "Christmas Trees". December 24, 2005. <<http://www.historychannel.com/exhibits/holidays/christmas/trees.html>>, 2005.

REFERENCES CITED

- Holweck, F. G. *The Catholic Encyclopedia Volume VI*. "Ecclesiastical Feasts". Ed. Robert Appleton Company, 1908. Online: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03724b.htm> Ed. K. Knight. 2003.
- Holy Bible: New King James Version*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1986.
- Jeffrey, Grant, *Triumphant Return*. "Why Do Some Teach that the Church will Endure the Tribulation?" Toronto: Frontier. 2001. Online Version http://www.grantjeffrey.com/article/why_some_reject.htm, 2002.
- MacArthur, Dr. John. Audio Sermon. *Grace to You*. "A Call for Discernment, Part 1". Broadcasted on February 21, 2006.
- Martindale, Cyril. *The Catholic Encyclopedia Volume III*. "Christmas". Ed. Robert Appleton Company, 1908. Online: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03724b.htm> Ed. K. Knight, 2003
- Mayer, Dwayne. Personal Conversations. Calgary Alberta. Unpublished. January 3, 2006; January 20, 2006.
- Missler, Chuck. "The History of Christmas." Thursday, January 12, 2006. http://www.khouse.org/enews_article/2003/679/ Koinonia House, 2006.
- Missler, Chuck. *Focus on Jerusalem Library*. "The Roots of Christmas." December 28, 2005. <http://focusonjerusalem.com/rootsofchristmas.html>, 2005.
- Neal, Daniel. *The History of the Puritans* London Vol. II. , 1837. Reprint Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1979. Page 458. As quoted on the website, *Christmas: A Biblical Critique*. "Christmas: An Historical Survey Regarding Its Origins and Opposition to It." *Presbyterian Heritage Publications* http://www.swrb.com/newslett/actualNLs/Xmas_ch2.htm January 12, 2006.
- Nichols, Mike. *Cheiron Hellenic Pagan Site*. "Midwinter Night's Eve: Yule". January 1, 2006. http://www.geocities.com/athens/parthenon/6670/doc/t_hlds.html. MicroMuse Press, Updated on January 18, 2000.

... But I LIKE Shiny ... A Biblical Critique of Christmas

Online Greek Lexicon. “αγιος”. Online Bible. Vancouver, BC: Timnathserah Inc., 1995-2001.

Ott, Michael. *The Catholic Encyclopedia Volume XI*. “St. Nicholas of Myra”. Ed. Robert Appleton Company, 1908. Online: Ed. K. Knight <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11063b.htm>>, 2003.

Oxford Paperback Encyclopaedia, “Transubstantiation”. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1998.

Pliny the Elder. *The Natural History*. Book XVI. *The Natural History of the Forest Trees*. Chapter 95 “Historical Facts Connected With the Mistletoe”. John Bostock, M.D., F.R.S. H.T. Riley, Esq., B.A. London. Taylor and Francis, Red Lion Court, Fleet Street. 1855. Online Version: Perseus Digital Library Project. Ed. Gregory R. Crane. September 20, 2005. <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?lookup=Plin.+Nat.+17.95>> Tufts University. December 26, 2005.

Pliny the Younger. *The Letters of Pliny the Younger*. Book 2. First Series. “Letter to Gallus”. The Walter Scott Publishing Co., Ltd. N.D. Online Version: AncientHistory.About.com. New York Times Company, 2005. December 26, 2005. <http://ancienthistory.about.com/library/bl/bl_text_plinyltrs2.htm>.

Pohle, J. *The Catholic Encyclopedia Volume III*. “Sacrifice of the Mass”. Ed. Robert Appleton Company, 1908. Online: <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10006a.htm>> Ed. K. Knight, 2003.

Pope John Paul II. Vatican Information Service. Notes on *Divinus Perfectionis Magister*. Holy See Press Office. September 12, 1997 as quoted by Flanagan, Paul and Robert Schihl. *Catholic Biblical Apologetics*. “The Canonization of Saints”. December 31, 2005. <<http://www.catholicapologetics.org/ap070400.htm>>. Copyright 1985-2004.

Ramsay, William. *Was Christ Born in Bethlehem?* Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, December 27, 2005 <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/ramsay/bethlehem.html>>, Updated November 6, 2005.

REFERENCES CITED

- Sandys, William. *Christmas Carols Ancient and Modern*. London: Richard Beckley. 1833.
- Simon, William L., ed., *The Reader's Digest Merry Christmas Songbook*. Pleasantville, NY: Readers Digest Association, 2003.
- Stammer, Larry B. "Taking the Christmas Out of Christ. (December 21, 2005)" *The Chicago Tribune Online*. Thursday, January 12, 2006. <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/la-mexmas21dec21,1,4002672,print.story?coll=chi-news-hed&ctrack=1&cset=true> The Los Angeles Times, 2006.
- Strong, James. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Online Bible. Vancouver, BC: Timnathserah Inc., 1995-2001.
- Tertullian. 1996. Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume I. "On Idolatry". Trans. The Rev. Alexander Roberts, D.D., and James Donaldson, LL.D., Sage Digital Library. Oregon; SAGE Software.
- Wesley, Charles. "Hark, How All the Welkin Rings". *The Hymns and Carols of Christmas*. January 1, 2006. Douglas D. Anderson. http://hymnsandcarolsofchristmas.com/Hymns_and_Carols/hark_how_all_the_welkin_rings.htm. 1996-2005.
- Wikipedia Contributors. *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*. "Santa Claus". December 27, 2005. http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Santa_Claus&oldid=32863471 Last Updated; 27 December 2005.

References Consulted

- Nattan, Steve. "Christmass Carols: Sound Doctrine, Or Catholic Tradition?" January 1, 2006.
<<http://www.blessedquietness.com/journal/resource/xmascrs.htm>> 1995-2000.
- Chumney, Edward. *The Seven Festivals of the Messiah*. Shippensburg: Treasure House. 1994. Online Version: January 20, 2006.
<http://www.hebroots.com/heb_root.html#SevenFestivalsBook>, November 24, 2005.
- Tetlow, Jim. *Messages from Heaven: A Biblical Examination of the Queen of Heaven's Messages in the End Times*. Book. Eternal Productions. 2002. Online version:
<<http://www.harpazo.net/EternalProductions/ApparitionsofMary/MFH.pdf>> 2004.
- Tetlow, Jim. *Messages from Heaven: A Biblical Examination of the Queen of Heaven's Messages in the End Times*. Video. Eternal Productions. 2002. Online version: January 20, 2006.
<<http://www.creationists.org/MessagesFromHeaven/english.html>> 2004.

